THE IMPACT OF THE KABBALAH IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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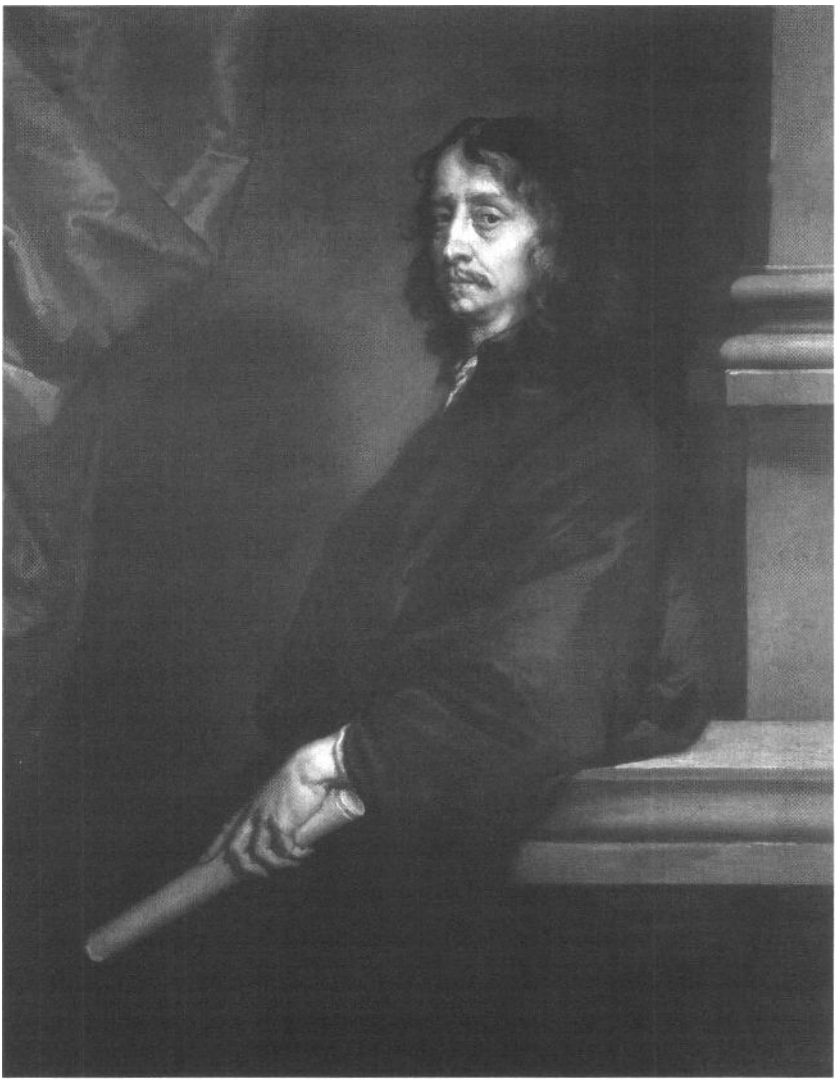

Portrait of Francis Mercury van Helmont by Sir Peter Lely, 1671 (by courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London).

THE IMPACT OF THE KABBALAH IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)

BY

ALLISON P. COUDERT

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DEDICATION

To the memory of Frances Amelia Yates and Daniel Perkin Walker

With grateful appreciation to Richard Henry Popkin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements IX

List of Plates XI

Introduction XIII

Chapter One: Early Life 1

Chapter Two: Diplomat and Courtier 21

Chapter Three: Arrest and Imprisonment 43

Chapter Four: Van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* 58

Chapter Five: The Sources of van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* 76

Chapter Six: Christian Knorr von Rosenroth and the *Kabbala denudata* ..100

Chapter Seven: The Kabbalah, Redemption, and the Idea of Progress 137

Chapter Eight: Francis Mercury van Helmont: A Kabbalist Physician 153

Chapter Nine: Anne Conway: Kabbalist and Quaker 177

Chapter Ten: Henry More, The Kabbalah, and the Quakers 220

Chapter Eleven: The Quakers' Rejection of the Kabbalah 241

Chapter Twelve: John Locke, Benjamin Furly, and The Kabbalah 271

Chapter Thirteen: Leibniz and the Kabbalah 308

Chapter Fourteen: Conclusion 330

Appendix One 350

Appendix Two 373

Bibliography 378

Index 414

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began this book as a twenty year old graduate student at the Warburg Institute and I finish it as a grandmother of five. That is a long time to be in the company of one person, in this case Francis Mercury van Helmont. I can only say that the company has been excellent, for through van Helmont I have had the good fortune to come into contact with many stimulating people, both living and dead, and to have made many good friends. My deepest debts are to the Warburg Institute, where I had the privilege of being both a Junior and a Senior Fellow, and to my tutors there, Frances Yates and Daniel Perkin Walker. They introduced me to van Helmont and in so doing shaped my life in ways they could scarcely have anticipated. It is to their enduring memory that I dedicate this book.

I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for awarding me a six-month Fellowship for College Teachers in 1994 and the Herzog August Bibliothek for their generous support in 1991 and again in 1994. These fellowships gave me the opportunity to continue my research and begin to put this book into its final form. My two stays in Wolfenbüttel were among the most rewarding scholarly experiences of my life, and I am extremely grateful to Dr. Sabine Solf and Dr. Gillian Bepler for making my stay so pleasant and memorable and to Dr. Eva Engel Holland for illustrating the meticulous care necessary for editing and interpreting texts. I especially enjoyed working with Professor Dr. Friedrich Niewöhner in planning a conference on the *Ursprache* (a subject discussed in Chapter Four and Five), held at the Herzog August Bibliothek in the summer of 1994.

I have incurred many debts in the course of writing this book. By extreme good luck, Majorie Hope Nicolson was the anonymous reader for the article I submitted to the *Journal of the History of Ideas* on van Helmont's kabbalistic nightmare. Her enthusiastic response to someone who was writing about "her old friends" (as she called Anne Conway, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and Henry More) led to a correspondence that greatly enriched my understanding of early modern history and literature. Van Helmont is also responsible for my meeting Gershom Scholem in 1972. I later learned that Professor Scholem's ability to inveigle books from people was legendary, which explains why my copy of van Helmont's *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima delineatio* is housed in the Scholem Library at Hebrew University. Had it not been for Richard H. Popkin, however, what began as a tentative thesis and several brief articles would never have become a book, much less this book. Through invitations to many of the conferences he has organized over the years, I have had the opportunity to investigate aspects of van Helmont's thought and cultural milieu of which I was entirely ignorant when I wrote my thesis. This book is

therefore very different and, I hope, a great deal better than it otherwise would have been. Like so many other scholars, I owe a debt of gratitude to Dick Popkin that can never be repaid.

Since 1972 when I completed my thesis, there has literally been an explosion of interest in the subjects that are central to this book, and I have benefited enormously from the work of many ingenious scholars, whose books and articles are gratefully cited in the footnotes and bibliography. Special thanks go to Sarah Hutton, who commented on the entire manuscript and thereby saved me from many errors. I am extremely grateful as well to Victor Nuovo for reading an earlier version of Chapter Twelve and for allowing me to benefit from his knowledge of John Locke. I also thank Donald Rutherford for organizing a special session on my book *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* at the March, 1998 meeting of the West Coast branch of the American Philosophical Association. This gave me the chance to refine some of the arguments in my earlier book, and I have included this material in Chapter Thirteen. Taylor Corse, my colleague at Arizona State University, has earned my unfailing gratitude for helping me decipher and translate difficult bits of Latin and Italian. I am also grateful to John Sewell, a graduate student in my department, whom I was fortunate to have as a research assistant.

Research for this book was done at many different libraries. I am especially grateful to the librarians at the Warburg Institute, the Herzog August Bibliothek, the British Library, the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, the Hamburg Staatsbibliothek, the Wellcome Library, the Bodleian Library, Dr. William's Library, and the Quakers London Yearly Meeting Library, who helped me locate manuscripts and obtain microfilm.

I thank David Katz, editor of Brill's series on Judaica, for including my book in his series and Julian Deahl and Gera van Bedaf for their editorial advice.

My final thanks go to my husband, Gordon Weiner, an unparalleled editor, many of whose insights into European and Jewish history have found their way into the following pages. I could never have finished this book, much less made it camera ready, without his invaluable help.

Francis Mercury van Helmont died three hundred years ago. His world was vastly different from our own. Yet the ideals he espoused of ecumenism and tolerance and his unremitting concern for the well-being of others are as relevant today as they were then.

Tempe, Arizona
August, 1998

LIST OF PLATES

Frontispiece. Portrait of Francis Mercury van Helmont by Sir Peter Lely, 1671 (by courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London).

1. Leibniz's epitaph for Francis Mercury van Helmont (by courtesy of the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover, MS Helmont, LBr 389, fol. 125).

2. Frontispiece to van Helmont's *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima delineation*. Sulzbach, 1667 (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

3. Figure of the Hebrew letter *aleph* from van Helmont's *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima delineation*. Sulzbach, 1667 (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

4. Figure of the Hebrew letter *gimel* from van Helmont's *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima delineation*. Sulzbach, 1667 (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

5. Diagram of the *sefirot* from the *Kabbala denudata*, vol. I, pt. 4, Fig xii (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

6. Frontispiece to the *Kabbala denudata* 1667 (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

7-8. Memorandum from George Fox to the Second Day's Morning Meeting about van Helmont's books (by courtesy of the Quakers London Yearly Meeting Library, Friends House, London).

INTRODUCTION

"If he had lived among the Greeks, he would now be numbered among the stars."[1] So wrote Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his epitaph for Francis Mercury van Helmont. Leibniz was not the only contemporary to admire and respect van Helmont. Although famous in his own day, he has been virtually ignored by modern historians. A full-scale intellectual and cultural biography has yet to be written of this man, who interacted with such important figures as John Locke, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, George Fox, William Penn, Henry More, Anne Conway, Karl Ludwig of the Palatine, and Sophie, Duchess of Hanover and mother of George I.

Van Helmont was the son of Paracelsus's most famous disciple, Jan Baptista van Helmont. Following in his father's footsteps, he studied alchemy, chemistry, and medicine, and even shared his father's fate of being arrested and imprisoned by the Inquisition. Although born a Catholic, he became the most famous (or infamous) Christian Kabbalist of the seventeenth century. Even more shockingly (from both a religious and social perspective) he converted to Quakerism for a short period on the mistaken assumption that the Quakers would accept his kabbalistic belief in universal salvation.

The younger van Helmont subscribed to what has been termed "the third component in western culture," which along-side Greek rationality and biblical faith played an important part in shaping the western intellect. This "third component" claimed the middle ground between pure rationality and doctrinal faith, emphasizing the importance of gnosis or the inner enlight-

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[1] Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover, MS Helmont, LBr 389, fol. 125:

Here lies the other van Helmont, in no way inferior to his father.
He joined together the arts and sciences and
Revived the sacred doctrines of Pythagoras and the Kabbalah.
Like Elaus he was able to make everything he needed with his own hands.
Had he been born in earlier centuries among the Greeks,
He would now be numbered among the stars.

"Nil patre inferior jacet hic Helmontius alter/ Qui junxit varias mentis et artis opes;/ Per quem Pythagoras et Cabbala sacra revixit,/ Elausque potest qui dare cuncta sibi./ Quod si Graja virum tellus, et prisca tulissent/ Secula, nunc inter lumina prima foret." In a note, Leibniz explains the reference to Elaus: "Hippias patria Elaus, professione philosophus, qui omnia quibus opus, manu sua elaborare poterat." Leibniz's statement that van Helmont would have been deified in earlier centuries implied that throughout his life he had lived up to the prevailing ideal of a perfect gentleman, who worked for the public rather than his own private good. John Locke described this ideal as follows: "By virtuous actions of this kind heroic men in former times were raised to the sky and placed among the number of gods, purchasing heaven not with a mass of riches brought together form all sides, but with toil, hazards, and liberality." Cited in Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*, p. 166. For a discussion of the ideal gentleman in early modern thought see Marshall, ibid., ch. 5. Leibniz could also have in mind what Plato says in the *Timaeus* about those who lived well being allowed to return and dwell in their native star (*Timaeus* 41e-42e).

enment that comes from true self knowledge.[2] This current has surfaced periodically in western history, becoming especially strong during the Renaissance with the emergence of the synthesis of Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and kabbalistic philosophy characterizing Renaissance occultism. Van Helmont's thought fits squarely in this tradition, but he added to it new kabbalistic sources that helped to lay the ground work for the Enlightenment.

Van Helmont was committed to reform in all areas of life. He translated and published Octavius Pisani's *Lycurgus Italicus*, a remarkably progressive book on penal reform, which anticipated Beccaria's suggestions a century later.[3] He cogently criticized the medical establishment for its scientific rigidity and social elitism. He entered the political arena as an adviser to Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate (1617-80) and Christian August of Sulzbach (1622-1708), suggesting ways to restore the shattered economies and reduce religious tensions in these two territories devastated by the Thirty Years' War. Van Helmont's published work advocates an ideal of religious toleration that make inspiring reading to this day, especially when it came to Jews. For unlike the vast majority of Christians, he did not predicate his tolerance of Jews on their conversion.[4] Yet the major impetus behind van Helmont's zeal for scientific progress, social reform, and religious toleration appears strange from a twentieth century perspective and requires explanation since it was a corollary of his life-long commitment to the doctrines of the Jewish Kabbalah. This commitment is demonstrated by his role in the publication of the *Kabbala denudata*, a collection and translation of the largest number of kabbalistic texts available to the Latin-reading public until the nineteenth

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[2] Van den Broek and Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism. From Antiquity to Modern Times*, pp. vii, x. Dan argues against the use of the terms "Gnosticism" and "gnostic" on the grounds that they are too imprecisely used to be meaningful ("Jewish Gnosticism?"). Williams has taken the even more radical position that "Gnosticism" should be dismantled as a "dubious category" (*Rethinking "Gnosticism"*). It is therefore with some trepidation that I use the terms in this book. I do so simply because I can think of no better way to describe the radical (and from an orthodox Christian perspective heretical) idea that individuals can gain the necessary knowledge for salvation through their own efforts, without the intervention of the Church or sacrifice of Christ. I agree with Elaine Pagels that this idea, characteristic of gnostic Christians, survived as a suppressed current, reemerging periodically, especially among radical sectarians in the seventeenth century. See Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. To further complicate matters, the kind of Gnosticism I describe as characteristic of van Helmont's understanding of the Lurianic Kabbalah is monistic and not dualistic. Although most descriptions of Gnosticism insist on its dualistic nature, there was a variety of "monadic gnosis" described by Clement of Alexandria and characteristic of the Valentinian texts discovered at Nag Hammadi as well as portions of the *Hermetica*, which exerted a profound influence on van Helmont. This is discussed more fully in ch. 6. For a defense of retaining the term Gnosticism as well as a discussion of its essential features, see Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, pp. 6ff. and passim. See also Elliot Wolfson, who argues that the Zohar "moved beyond gnostic dualism into theosophical monism" ("Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar").

[3] Cesare Bonesana, Marchese de Beccaria (1738-1794) published *Dei Delitti e delle Pene* (*On Crimes and Punishment*) in 1764. The small volume went through six editions in eighteen months and was translated into twenty-two languages. Voltaire wrote a preface for the French edition. Like Pisani, Beccaria was more concerned with preventing than punishing crime. He condemned capital punishment, torture, and the confiscation of property.

[4] On the reality and limits of toleration in the early modern period, see the excellent collection of essays in *Beyond the Persecuting Society*, ed. Laursen and Nederman.

century. No less an authority than Gershom Scholem has remarked on the generally high caliber of the translations in the *Kabbala denudata*.[5] These were made by van Helmont's close friend and collaborator, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-89), and the work was published in the tiny principality of Sulzbach, some forty miles southeast of Nuremberg, at the Hebrew printing press financed by van Helmont, von Rosenroth, and their patron, Prince Christian August. Because the subject matter of the *Kabbala denudata* appears so esoteric, it has never been appreciated as a significant text for understanding the emergence of modern thought. But within this work one can find the basis for the faith in science, belief in progress, and commitment to religious toleration characteristic of the best aspects of western culture. Voltaire and his fellow *philosophes* rejected all revealed religion, particularly Judaism, as the antithesis of reason; but an analysis of the creative ways in which men like van Helmont interpreted Scripture with the help of the Jewish Kabbalists reveals how heavily indebted Enlight-enment thought was to the occultism of the previous century. The *Kabbala denudata* thus deserves a place it has not yet received in discussions about the modern concept of progress and the development of western science, as do its two editors, van Helmont and von Rosenroth, and their patron Christian August.[6]

During the seventeenth century interest in the Kabbalah was not restricted to the circle of Christian Kabbalists at the Sulzbach court. Van Helmont traveled extensively and wherever he went, the Kabbalah went with him. One place he visited frequently was Hanover, where he spent long periods of time with Leibniz. As I have argued in *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (and will argue in this book as well), Leibniz was neither the fatuous fool Voltaire made him out to be in the character of Dr. Pangloss nor the supreme rationalist described by so many subsequent philosophers and historians of science. He was a humanist in all senses of the word, who was committed to the improvement of the human condition on every level; and many of the ideas he brought to this life-long task were stimulated by his friendship with van Helmont and their lengthy conversations about the esoteric philosophy of the Kabbalah.

Leibniz was not the only friend van Helmont introduced to the Kabbalah. In 1670 he traveled to England and while there met the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687), who implored van Helmont to visit his good friend Anne, Viscountess Conway (1631-1679). From the age of seventeen Anne Conway had suffered from increasingly severe and incapacitating headaches. More hoped that van Helmont's skill as an alchemist and physician, who reputedly possessed miraculous medicines, would prove equal to the task of curing her. He was to be disappointed. But while van Helmont

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[5] Scholem, "Christian Knorr von Rosenroth," *Kabbalah*, pp. 416-19.

[6] Kemp has remarked on this oversight: "as far as I know a detailed examination and critical study of the translation and edition completed by Knorr von Rosenroth and his assistants has not yet appeared. In the same way one will have to wait even longer for a thorough biography of Francis Mercury van Helmont." See Kemp's introduction to the reprint of von Rosenroth's *Aufgang der Artzney-Kunst*, p. xxvi.

the task of curing her. He was to be disappointed. But while van Helmont was not able to help Conway as a physician, he helped her as a Kabbalist by enabling her to envision her own suffering in kabbalistic terms as part of the divine redemptive process leading to universal salvation. More was terribly distressed by Conway's growing commitment to kabbalistic beliefs. He did everything in his power to dissuade both her and van Helmont from accepting doctrines which be believed undermined Christianity and encouraged atheism and pantheism. More failed. Van Helmont stayed with Anne Conway to the end of her life nine years later. During this period they collaborated on several kabbalistic works. Conway also wrote a short treatise on her own, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, in which she employed kabbalistic theories to refute the philosophy of Hobbes, Descartes, and Spinoza. This was posthumously published by van Helmont. It is arguably the most interesting work published by a woman in the seventeenth century and all the more interesting because Leibniz thought highly of it.[7]

Van Helmont's association with Anne Conway is not only memorable for their mutual interest in the Kabbalah but also for the profound effect their kabbalistic philosophy had on contemporary Quakers. The Quakers were ardent proselytizers, but when they made their first missionary visit to the Conway estate, Ragley Hall, in 1675, they found more than they bargained for in van Helmont, who was an equally zealous proselytizer. A sect of so-called "Helmontian" Quakers arose from this encounter. They eagerly accepted van Helmont's kabbalistic ideas because they offered an answer to the seemingly insoluble problem of how Christianity could be a religion of universal love and peace when it postulated the damnation of all but a tiny fraction of the world's population. The story does not end with the Quakers; the next step leads to van Helmont's association with John Locke, who became involved with van Helmont's kabbalistic philosophy.

How can one explain these friendship between men usually seen as belonging on opposite ends of the religious, philosophical, and scientific spectrum? One answer must be that the clear-cut divisions made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between rationalists and empiricists, occultists and scientists, vitalists and mechanists are misleading. What united van Helmont and his many friends was their mutual interest in natural philosophy, their sincere interest in religion, and their heartfelt desire to promote tolerance and ecumenism.

Not all people, however, were sympathetic to van Helmont's ideas. In many cases he unfortunately lacked the Midas touch he so wished to have.

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[7] "My philosophical views approach somewhat closely those of the late Countess Conway, and hold a middle position between Plato and Democritus, because I hold that all things take place mechanically as Demoncritus and Descartes contend against the view of Henry More and his followers, and hold too, nevertheless, that every thing takes place according to a living principle and according to final cause—all things are full of life and consciousness, contrary to the views of the atomists" (G III:217). Leibniz's annotated copy of Conway's treatise is in Hanover in the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek.

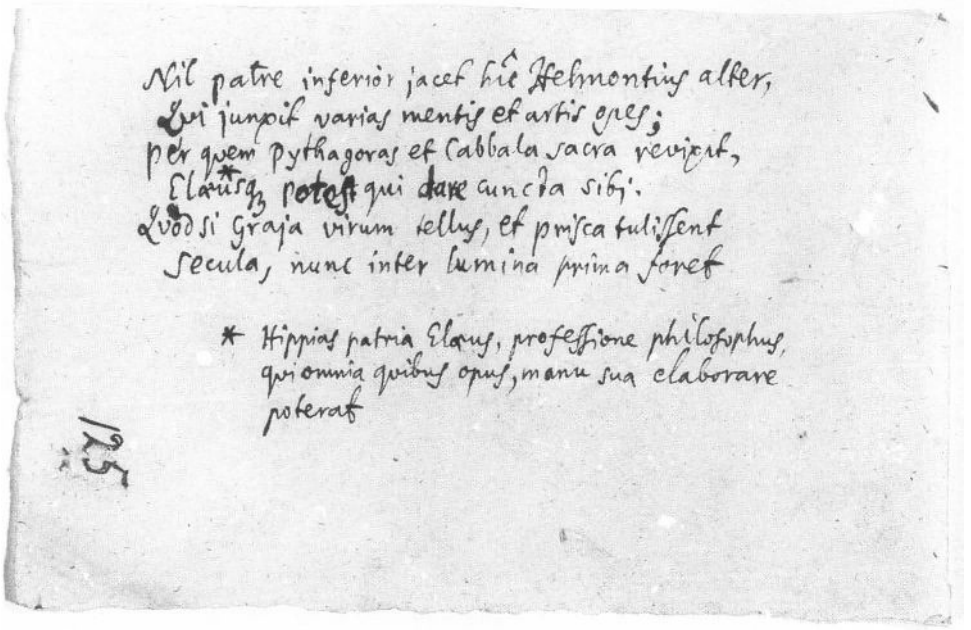

Nil patre inferior jacet hic Helmontius alter,
Qui junxit varias mentis et artis opes;
per quem Pythagoras et Cabbala sacra revixit,
Clarius* potuit qui dare cuncta sibi.
Quod si Graja virum tellus, et prisca tulissent
Secula, nunc inter lumina prima foret
* Hippias patria Elaeus, professione philosophus,
qui omnia quibus opus, manu sua elaborare
poterat
125

Fig. 1. Leibniz's epitaph for Francis Mercury van Helmont (by courtesy of the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover, MS Helmont, LBr 389, fol. 125).

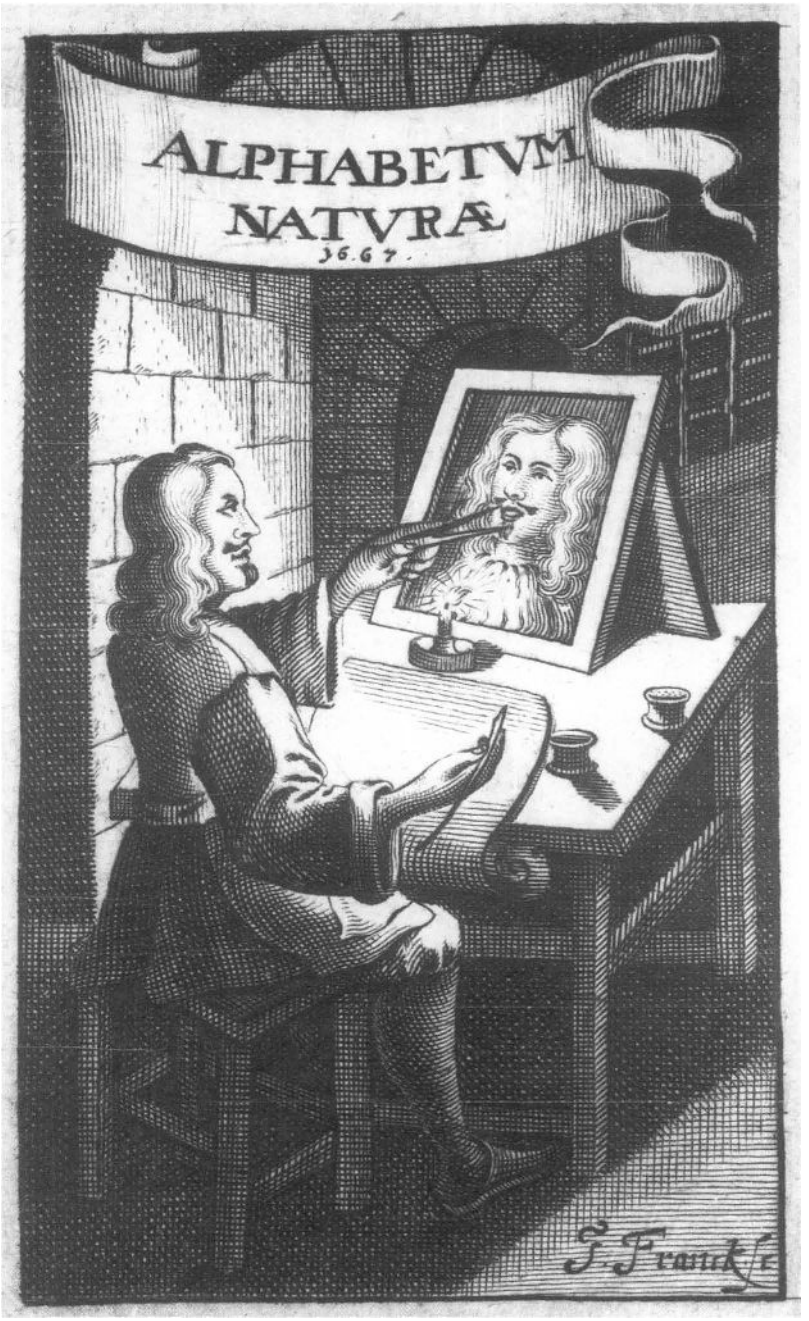
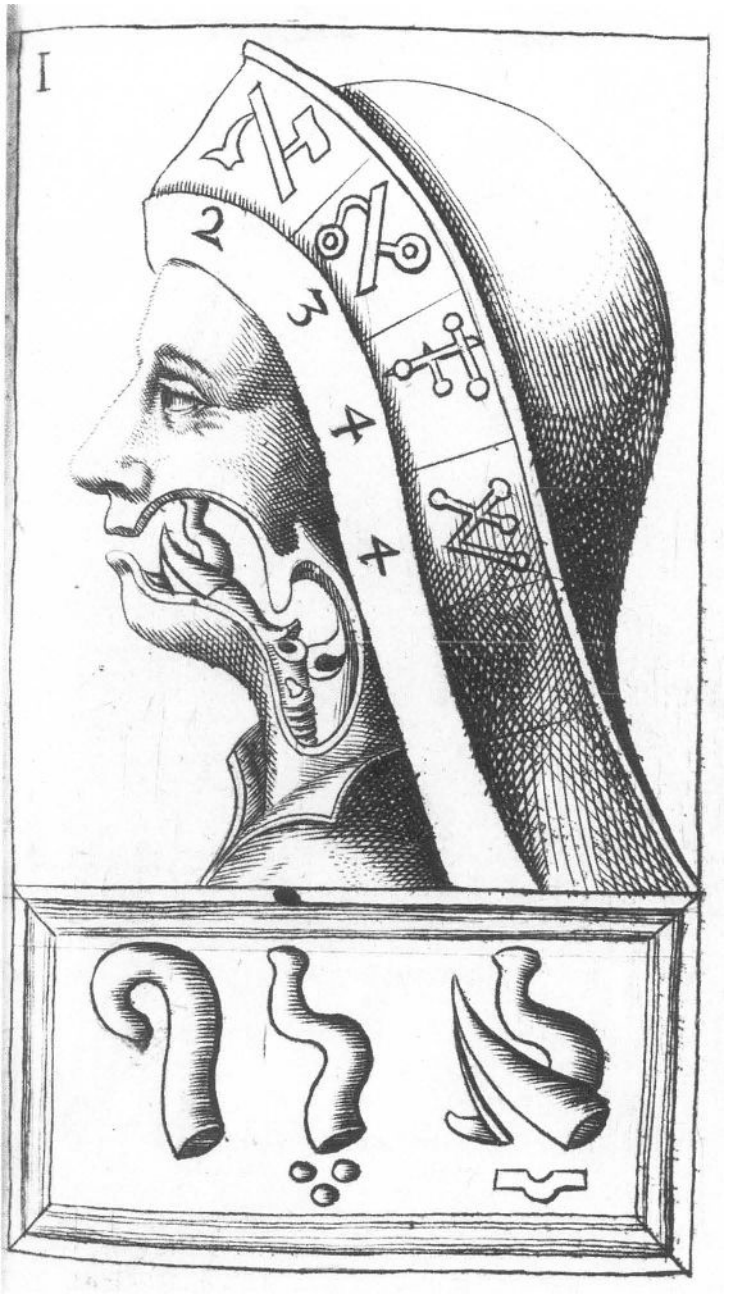


Fig. 2. Frontispiece to van Helmont's *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima delineation.* Sulzbach, 1667 (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).



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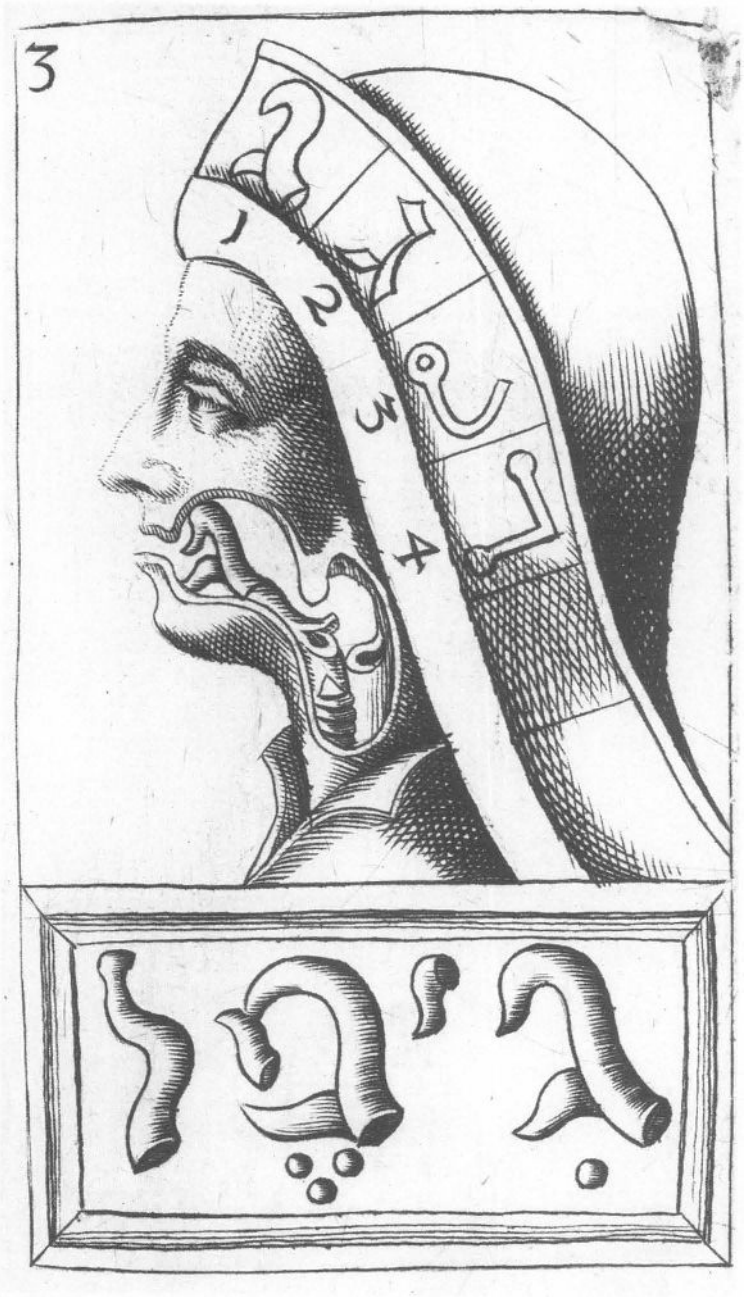

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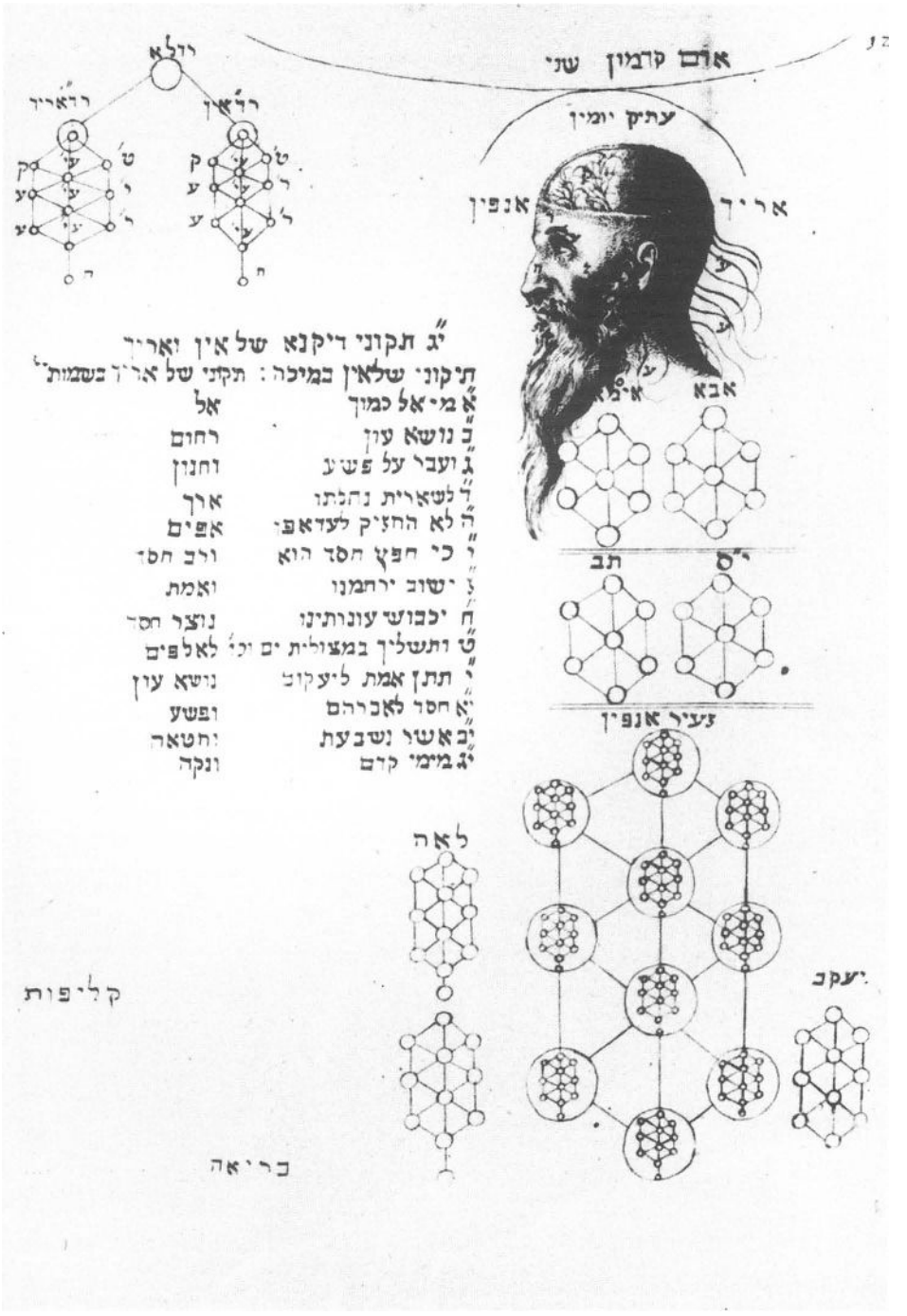

Fig. 5. Diagram of the *sefirot* from the *Kabbala denudata*, vol. I, pt. 4, Fig. xii (from the copy in the Wellcome Library, London, by courtesy of the Trustees).

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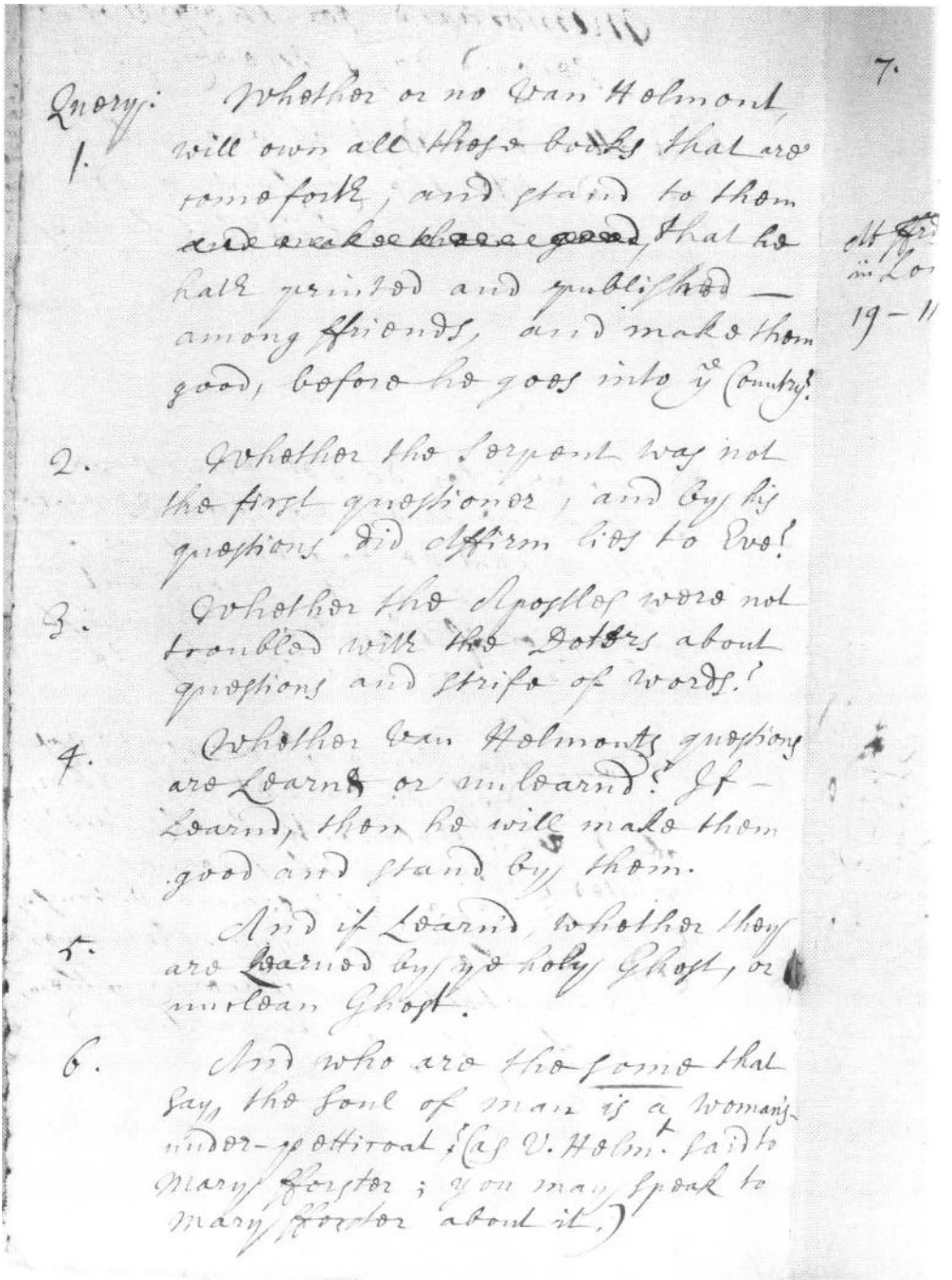

Qury: Whether or no Dan Holmont
1. will own all those books that are
come forth, and stand to them
and make them good that he
hath printed and published —
among friends, and make them
good, before he goes into ye Country.

2. Whether the Serpent was not
the first Gruppion, and by his
gruppions did affirm lies to Eve?

3. Whether the Apostle were not
troubled with the Doters about
gruppions and strife of words?

4. Whether Dan Holmonts gruppions
are Learn or unlearn? If
Learn, then he will make them
good and stand by them.

5. And if Learn, whether they
are learned by ye holy Ghost, or
unclean Ghost.

6. And who are the some that
say, the soul of man is a woman's
under-pettiroat (as V. Holm. said to
Mary Forster; you may speak to
Mary Forster about it.)

7.

ott ...
in Lo...
19 – 11

Fig. 7. Memorandum from George Fox to the Second Day's Morning Meeting about van Helmont's books (by courtesy of the Quakers London Yearly Meeting Library, Friends House, London).

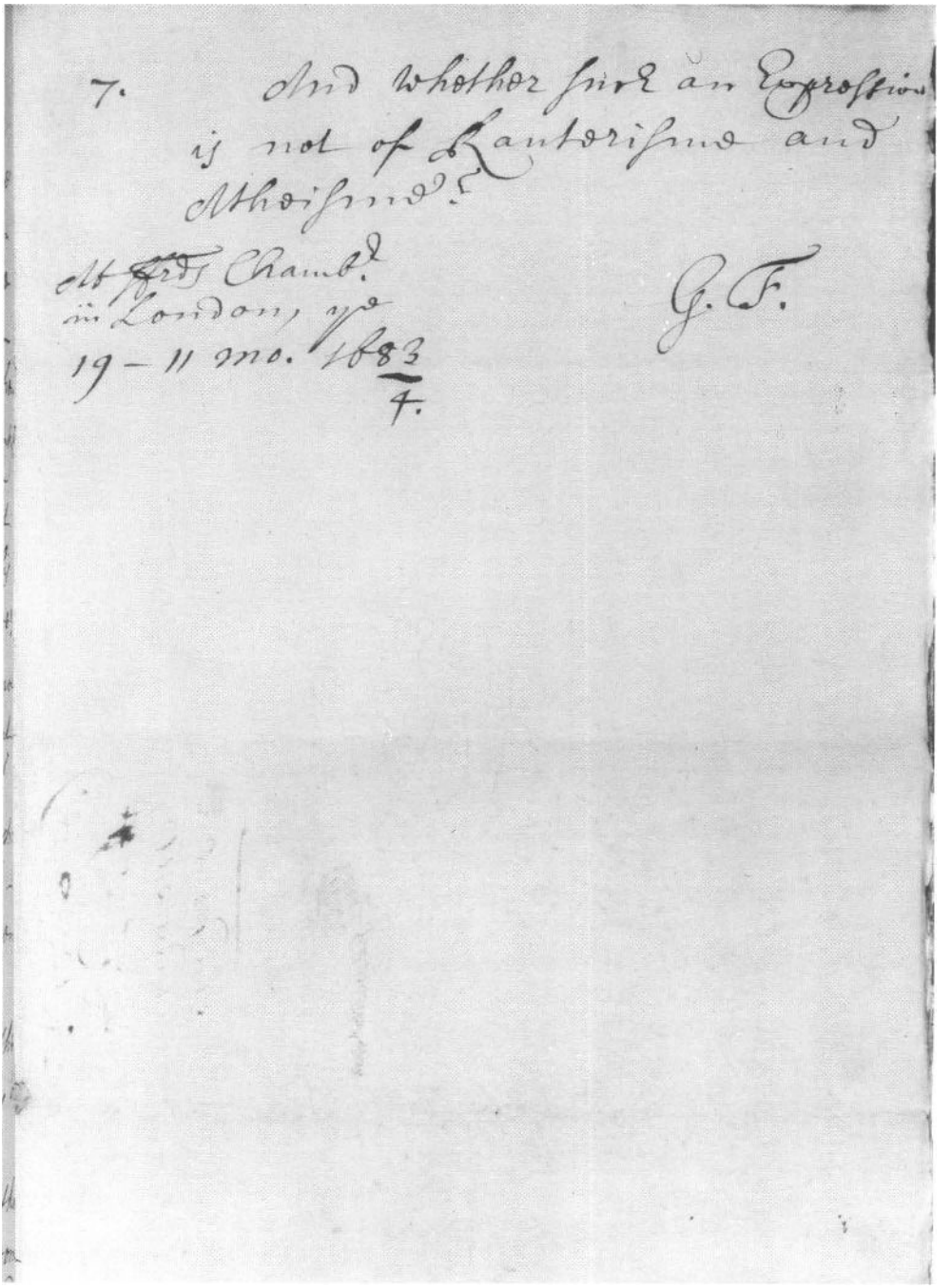

Fig. 8. Memorandum from George Fox to the Second Day's Morning Meeting about van Helmont's books (by courtesy of the Quakers London Yearly Meeting Library, Friends House, London).

Instead of turning everything he handled to philosopher's gold (be it in the realm of chemistry and medicine with the elixir of life or in politics and society with the golden mean of harmony and toleration), he often left discord and misunderstanding in his wake. He was, for example, imprisoned for two years by the Roman Inquisition on the charge of "Judaizing." The documents relating to his trial, which make up an extensive file in the "Secret Archives of the Vatican," illustrate the problematic relationship between Christians and Jews at the time and significantly modify the description of the early modern period as philo-Semitic. They also illustrate the lengths to which the Inquisition would go to root out heresy. Van Helmont's case qualifies recent scholarship which tends to emphasize the scrupulousness and relative fairness of Inquisitorial procedures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (a subject that will be discussed in a later chapter). He was eventually released, but only because he had powerful Catholic friends, not because of the absurd nature of the charges against him.

The majority of Protestants were no more receptive to van Helmont's ideas than Catholics, although their very disunity impeded the kind of drastic action taken by the Inquisition. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, was particularly critical. He called a meeting to investigate van Helmont's kabbalistic beliefs. They were eventually rejected and van Helmont left the Society, although he spoke with admiration of the Quakers to his dying day. The Lutherans in Sulzbach made their opposition to van Helmont's ideas crystal clear when they tried to kill him not once but twice.

How could a man who inspired so much affection and respect among his friends be the target of such passionate enmity and hatred? The answer lies in the nature of the times in which van Helmont lived. The seventeenth century was an age of continual crisis in both the natural and political world. It was a period of vicious religious controversy and non-stop warfare—only seven years out of a hundred saw peace.[8] The concept of toleration was meaningless to the vast majority of people, who were ready to defend their beliefs to the death.[9] Mediators like van Helmont were credited with the basest motives and relentlessly vilified: for Protestants he was a hated emissary of the Pope, a Jesuit, or Franciscan, for Catholics, an anarchist, Anabaptist, or Quaker; yet both groups also described him as an atheist, a term of even greater opprobrium at the time.[10]

The seventeenth century was a period of stark contrasts: witch burnings and the brilliant mathematical physics of Isaac Newton; John Locke's plea for tolerance and the palpable lack of it; the richness of intellectual and artistic life and the poverty of material life for all but a tiny percentage of the population. Whether rich or poor, ruler or ruled, the situation most people

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[8] Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*; Webster ed., *Health Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*; Clarkson, *Death, Disease & Famine in Pre-industiral England*; MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England*.

[9] Zagorin, *Persecution and Conformity*.

[10] Hunter and Wootton, eds. *Atheism in Early Modern Europe*.

England during the 1640s was thirty-two years. Small pox affected nine out of ten people, killing one in seven and disfiguring the majority of the rest. Plague was desperately and justifiably feared. Van Helmont's two older brothers were among its numerous victims. In the same terrible plague year that took their lives, all the inhabitants of Malpas, a small hamlet in Cheshire, died. The last man to fall sick actually dug his own grave and buried himself.[11]

There was no clear idea of contagion in the seventeenth century or of the importance of sanitation and personal hygiene in combating disease. Samuel Pepys hardly ever washed more than his hands, face, and neck until his wife went to the bathhouse and refused to allow Pepys in bed with her until he bathed. Pepys stood firm for three days and then relented.[12] The habits of King Charles I and his courtiers were even less refined. Anthony Wood describes the foul state of Christ's College after the court fled from Oxford during the Civil War: "Though they were very neat and gay in their apparel," he wrote, "yet they were very nasty and beastly, leaving their excrements in every corner, in chimneys, studies, cole-houses, cellars."[13] Under such conditions, typhus ran rampant, worms were a common and debilitating complaint, and infection a prevalent, all too often mortal affliction. Death could come from the most trivial accident at the most unexpected time. Wanton violence was a fact of life when destitute vagabonds roamed the countryside and city gentlemen wore swords, drank copiously, and cavorted about unlit streets, a prey to robbers and their own aggressive tempers. The antiquarian John Aubrey reports that he was almost killed by a passing, irate gentleman he scarcely knew.[14] Any turn in the weather could spell scarcity and starvation since roads were few and bad and transportation precarious. The dread of fire was a constant source of anxiety in an age when wooden buildings were the norm.

There was no insurance against any of these menaces, which makes it all the more extraordinary that van Helmont lived to be eighty four. Certainly medicine, with its standard therapies of blood-letting and purging, was little help. As Robert Boyle, the greatest chemist of his age, remarked, he "apprehend(ed) more from the physician than the disease," an understandable sentiment when one considers the remedies prescribed at the time. "To cure the Thrush," advises John Aubrey, "Take a living frog, and hold it in a Cloth, that it does not go down into the Child's mouth; putt the Head into the Child's mouth till it is dead; and then take another frog."[15] The standard medical work of the day, Richard Wiseman's *Severall Chirurgicall Treatises* (1676), was popularly known as "Wiseman's Book of Martyrs."[16]

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[11] J.C. Cox, *The Parish Registers of England* (1910), p. 175.
[12] *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, February 21, 22, 25, 1665.
[13] *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood*, II, p. 68.
[14] *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, p. 8.
[15] ibid., p. 10.
[16] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p 10.

Yet for all the poverty, insecurity, pain, and superstition, the seventeenth century produced a stunning galaxy of writers, artists, philosophers, and scientists, who laid the foundation for modern culture. To paraphrase Alfred North Whitehead, we are still living off the capital accumulated by seventeenth century intellectuals. Much has been written about the crucial role the late seventeenth century played in preparing the way for the Enlightenment. Out of the confusing mix of mystical, magical, and scientific beliefs characterizing the thinking of the early modern period a rationalist philosophy gradually emerged based on the conviction that man was essentially good and reason a noble tool in the inevitable march of progress. The belief in the power and perspicacity of man arose in part from occult sources, from alchemy, Hermeticism, Renaissance Neoplatonism, and the Kabbalah. In different ways each of these philosophies advocated the idea that man could perfect himself and the world.

During the past thirty years there has been an increasing willingness to recognize the important ways in which mystical and occult thinking contributed to the development of science and the emergence of toleration.[17] However, the Kabbalah, particularly the Lurianic Kabbalah with its optimistic, vitalist philosophy of perfectionism and universal salvation has not yet been integrated into the new historiography, although it richly deserves to be. The study of the Kabbalah shows how important it is to integrate Jewish history into the broader history of Europe. The Kabbalah offered something of a permeable barrier between Christians and Jews, allowing for the circulation of ideas. The kabbalistic vision of a universe restored to its original perfection through human effort provided the basis for a radically optimistic philosophy predicated on the conviction that progress is inevitable, an idea which became hallmarks of both the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Kabbalistic ideas also influenced the debate about language that preoccupied so many intellectuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, culminating in the conflict between Leibniz and Locke over the nature of the human understanding. The effect of the Kabbalah on Christian religious thought was also significant. Christians who accepted the kabbalistic notion of universal salvation rejected the doctrine of predestination and the concept of an eternal hell and tended to minimize, or allegorize, the role of Christ in the redemptive process. For these Christians,

[17] For a good overview of this issue (with appropriate bibliography) see Ross, "Occultism and Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century"; Schaffer, "Occultism and Reason"; and Ross' "Reply to Schaffer"; Pagel, *Joan Baptista van Helmont*; idem, "Religious Motives in the Medical Biology of the XVIIth Century"; idem, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*; Popkin, "Newton's Biblical Theology and his Theological Physics"; idem, "The Religious Background of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy"; idem, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought;* Westfall, "Newton and Alchemy"; Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*; eadem, *The Janus Face of Genius: the Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought.*

and Leibniz was among them, doctrinal differences appeared increasingly insignificant.[18]

If it is possible to draw parallels between periods, the seventeenth century has much in common with our own. Like ours it was a time of tremendous confusion, bitter conflict, profound questioning, and the rejection of traditional values. But the values that are breaking down in our time—the belief in progress, trust in science, faith in education, commitment to tolerance, and respect for the individual—are paradoxically the very values that appeared in embryonic form during the seventeenth century. Reading about the past cannot provide solutions to present problems, but to know how human beings once lived and thought and to understand the ambitions, fears, and beliefs that motivated their actions throws light on our own behavior, if only by way of contrast.

These are the subjects discussed in the following pages. Since the unifying link between them all is Francis Mercury van Helmont, the book begins and ends with him.

[18] In his stimulating book, *Alchemy of the Word. Cabala of the Renaissance*, Beitchman comes to the very different conclusion that the Christian Kabbalah came to a dead end with van Helmont and "lapsed or evolved into imagination, dream, and ingenuity. . . . " (p. 207). I hope I can persuade the reader otherwise, all the more so because Beitchman describes the Kabbalah as "a useful if controversial tool in opening up Christianity to new thought and practices, or ancient ones that had been expelled from the Church" (p. 49), which is exactly what I contend van Helmont's kabbalistic philosophy did.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY LIFE OF FRANCIS MERCURY VAN HELMONT

Francis Mercury van Helmont was born in Vilvorde, a suburb of Brussels, in October 1614.[1] His birth and baptism were shrouded in a mystery which van Helmont cultivated to the end of his life. Baptized simply "Mercury" van Helmont, the young child grew up in a house in which Hermeticism was his daily bread. He was the third son and fifth child of the illustrious chemist Jan Baptista van Helmont (1579-1644), a follower of Paracelsus and one of the outstanding iatrochemists of his day. Because of his father's disgust with prevailing educational standards, Mercury was educated entirely at home. The impact of his father's thought and philosophy is certainly one of the most significant aspects of van Helmont's own philosophy. But his singular intelligence and insatiable curiosity stopped him from becoming a servile expositor of his father's ideas.

It has been suggested that Mercury's birth coincided with the moment in which the elder van Helmont performed the supreme alchemical act of transmutation.[2] Mercury was hardly an ordinary name signifying as it did for all alchemists the precious, mysterious matter, the philosopher's mercury and tool of transmutation, and calling to mind the very founder of the art, Hermes, or Mercurius, Trismegistus.[3] The story rings true. Up to the day he died, the elder van Helmont was convinced that transmutation was possible, and he even says he performed this feat on several occasions. Perhaps one such occasion occurred shortly before Francis Mercury's birth.

> I am constrained to believe that there is the Stone which makes Gold, and which makes Silver; because I have at distinct turns, made projection with my hand, of one grain of the Powder, upon some thousand grains of hot Quick-Silver; and the business succeeded in the Fire, even as Books do promise; a Circle of many People standing by, together with a tickling Admiration of us all.[4]

Very little is known about young van Helmont's childhood. That he grew up in an atmosphere in which science and the search for knowledge were held in highest esteem is obvious from repeated statements his father makes in his

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[1] There is some question as to whether van Helmont was born in 1614 or 1618. The later date would fit with Leibniz's description of van Helmont in 1698 as about eighty. But the text of the baptismal record reads as follows: "Acte de naissance No. 116 de 1614, 20 Octob. baptizatus est Mercurius legitimus D. Joannes Batistae Van Helmont et D. Margaritae Van Dam." An error appears in the name of the mother which should be Van Ranst. Cited Mévergnies, *Jean-Baptiste van Helmont: Philosophe par le Feu*, p. 80, n. 40.

[2] Figuier, *L'Alchimie et les Alchimistes*, p. 207.

[3] The elder van Helmont considered mercury a special substance. In his view the "seed" of mercury was "not a mortal one, not perishable, and does not obey the laws which rule the sublunary bodies" (*Ortus medicinae*, p. 407).

[4] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 807.

writings. A certain asceticism, rebelliousness, and sense of mission characterizes the life of the elder van Helmont, an outlook which was to become even more pronounced in the life of his youngest son. From infancy Francis Mercury was involved in his father's work, first as a living example of his theories, later as an assistant in his father's laboratory. Even the regimen of the infant child was dictated by the father's medical theories. Moderate exercise and proper nourishment were the means to health, and one suspects that Francis Mercury grew up in part on a diet of bread boiled in thin ale with honey "until like glew or Jelly" and then thinned with more ale, for milk in the eyes of the elder van Helmont was too difficult to digest, too subject to the temperament of the wet nurse, whose disturbed thoughts might reach the child through the milk. This gruel, plus four drops of the "Tree of Life" (an alchemical quintessence made in forty days from the cedars of Lebanon) two times a day, was most probably Francis Mercury's fare. One can only add that he lived to the age of 84.[5]

Francis Mercury describes his involvement in his father's work in his preface to the posthumous edition he prepared of his father's collected writing in 1648. He suggests that he of all van Helmont's sons was closest to his father, a relationship which undoubtedly became all the closer when the death of his two elder brothers left him the only surviving son. With a certain condescension to the boorish ideals of his kinsfolk, Francis Mercury offers a vignette of himself as seen through the eyes of his relatives. He clearly takes pride in the unconventional behavior they condemn:

> I was outwardly cloathed with simple or homely raiment, and for the more inward contracting of my mind, as also for curing thereof, I acted many things known to God alone, as also for the preservation of my health, and increasing of my strength, I lived soberly for many Years together, I also abstained from fleshes, like as also from Fishes, Wine, and Ale or Beer; and that so far, that I incurred the contempt and disdain of my kindred, who upbraided me as I conjecture, from a good zeal: What unwonted thing doth he again begin? He renders himself unfit for every condition and function, as well Ecclesiastical as secular: He will at length become mad, when he shall no longer find any novelty for his Delight, or shall adict himself to Magical Arts, or shall attempt a new Heresie. It is become with him, as with other wise mens Children, as to persist in obstinancy.
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> Others moreover, redoubled; His Father is in the fault, for he hath rashly educated all his Children, he admitted them from their tender years, unto the Art of the Fire: This man being now become foolish, hath lost the opportunity or occasion of happiness; when *Isabella Clara Eugenia*, the Infanta of Spain, received him, and appointed him for a noble service with her Nephew the chief Cardinal, he refused it: it were better he had died instead of his Bretheren, some good might have been expected from them; this man is serviceable for no employment: If he gapes after studies, let him submit himself to his Teachers,

[5] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, "The nourishing of an infant for Long Life," pp. 779 (should be 797)-799. Cedars are symbols of eternity since their wood resists decay. According to Jöcher, the younger van Helmont claimed that he was never sick and attributed this to daily flag waving (*Allgemeines gelehrten Lexicon*).

> as it is the manner of others to do; or if he is to be induced to marry a Wife, who may shake off these strange things from him.
>
> On the contrary, others retorted; this is too late, replying by a mock, he is a philosopher, he is too stubborn, he is no where seen except in the company of most unconstant, strange, and uncouth persons, of whatsoever profession and employment; he will also incur a misfortune, for he knows not how to dissemble, he spareth none, neither great nor small, when he discerns that which is unjust; we are now dejected from all hope, he must needs be reduced unto wants, for he hath yielded up all his Patrimony, both that which he did possess, and what should have fallen to him, unto his sisters; and moreover, as joyful, he hath departed hence, far from home, as shewing that he is never to return; who ever remembered the like! He must needs undergo some changes, not withstanding, it matters not to us concerning what, so that he be not accounted foolish, so as to cast off his old dresses, except better, and more certain ones should supply him.
>
> Conjectures fail us, seeing that he hath entered into these things without our counsel; let himself also look to what the end will be; when he shall stand in need of us, let him be accounted as a stranger.[6]

All the elements of the younger van Helmont's complex character are here: his restlessness, his unorthodoxy, his disdain for common mores and opinions, his inability to dissimulate and his sense of mission in the search for knowledge. And how accurate was the prophecy of his relatives when they said, "he. . . shall. . . addict himself to Magical Arts, or shall attempt a new Heresie."

Francis Mercury was not entirely happy with his father's decision to educate him at home:

> I Mercurius, being from my tender years, brought up by my Father in the select School of Hermes and there after some sort seasoned, my spirit being unquiet, was not content therewith, as desiringly desired thorowly to know the whole sacred Art, or Tree of Life, and to enjoy it.[7]

He particularly regretted that he had not been raised on the standard fare of Latin and describes how he taught himself the language by reading a Latin and German edition of the New Testament. This experience was the most formative one of his youth, for it reinforced the alchemical and mystical conviction that colored his subsequent life and philosophy, namely that God created all things as a perfect whole:

> I descending, ascended unto essential and occult or hidden properties, and for my aid the understanding of some Latine Books seemed to be desired; to this end I read over diverse times the New Testament, with the Latine Idiome, and the Germane, that by that means I might in a few dayes, not only understand the Latine style, but also in the aforesaid Testament, I might find the perfect, and long wished for, simple once only and Eternal Truth and Life, which the one thing (to wit God) doth onely and alone earnestly require, and is averse to all duality or plurality; So also whatsoever God hath created, he created all of it, in that one, and by that one thing, otherwise he had not kept order. And by

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[6] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, F.M. van Helmont's Preface to the Reader, p. 3.

[7] ibid., pp. 10-11.

> how much the more I knew this amiable, free, and only one thing in all things, and did enjoy it; I addressed myself to a quiet study.[8]

Unlike his father and most young men of his background, the younger van Helmont did not attend university, probably because of his father's dissatisfaction with the university education he had received at Louvain. As he says: "I. . . have never frequented Universities, as by this my unpolished Style doth sufficiently appear. Nevertheless, well observe ye, I utter no Saying in vain, but that it doth signifie something and pertain to the whole."[9] In later life Francis Mercury prided himself on associating with artisans, from whom he believed one could learn more than from books.

The death of the elder van Helmont in 1644 broke the personal tie which until then had kept his son at home; but it failed to destroy the intellectual bond which had grown so strong over the years. The first task Francis Mercury significantly set himself was to comply with his father's dying wish and prepare an edition of his collected works:

> A few daies preceding his Death, he said unto me; Take all my Writings, as well as those crude and uncorrected, as those that are thorowly expurged, and joyne them together; I now committ them to thy care; accomplish and digest all things according to thy own judgement.[10]

The edition of his father's works published by Francis Mercury in 1648 under the title of *Ortus Medicinae* was a mixed bag of metaphysical speculations and accurate and acute laboratory observation, the work of a scientist dedicated to exact analysis of chemical and biological phenomena and of a man whose religious convictions motivated the course of his research. It is impossible to understand the thought of the younger van Helmont without first considering his father's work. The premises and principles which led Francis Mercury from Catholicism to the mysticism of the Kabbalah and into the despised sect of the Quakers sprang from his father's philosophy. As Walter Pagel has pointed out, religion and science were inextricably entwined in the elder van Helmont's thought, as they would be in the thought of his son. Neither van Helmont was unique in this respect. The ideal of separating religion and science proposed by Galileo in his letter the Duchess Christina[11] (and supposedly practiced by the members of England's Royal Society) was just that, an ideal. In reality, seventeenth century scientists were deeply influenced by their religious beliefs, a subject that will come up repeatedly in the following chapters.[12] Henry Oldenburg reveals how true this was of the younger van Helmont. In a letter to Robert Boyle he describes his first meeting with Francis Mercury in 1658:

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[8] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, preface., p. 3.

[9] ibid., p. 11.

[10] ibid., p. 2.

[11] Galileo, *Letter to Madame Christina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, concerning the Use of Biblical Quotations in Matters of Science* (1615).

[12] For a general discussion of the close connection between science and religion in the seventeenth century, see Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, chapters 2-4.

> The travels being now passed, by the goodness of Almighty God, in health and safety, and we for two or three daies at some more leasure, than ordinary, I thought I could not better imploy a part thereof, than in waiting on you by a few lines, and therein acquaint you first of all of the congress, we had more than once with Mr. v. Helmont . . . In his discourses with us he fell constantly from philosophical or medical matters to divinity, recommending extremely a severe scrutiny of oneselfe, as being persuaded, that the best and most solid knowledge comes from within a man and dissuading us from the toy (as his phrase was) of books, whereby he thought there was but another mans image and counterfeit imposed upon us, and we detained from every knowing ourselves, and those things, that lye hid in us, man being esteemed by him the abridgement of the upper and lower world. Ordinarily he puts men off with saying, He knows nothing.[13]

Whatever the younger van Helmont said to the contrary, "another mans image and counterfeit" had been imposed on him, that of his father. For his rejection of the authority of books and emphasis on the discovery of knowledge hidden within the human soul or mind was one of the defining aspects of his father's philosophy. But it was also one of the crucial points in the debate between Paracelsians and Galenists that was played out with considerable acrimony during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[14]

The conflict between Paracelsians and Galenists was part of a larger conflict that arose in the Renaissance with the emergence of two distinct forms of Humanism: the Neoplatonic, Hermetic, magical strain that emphasized illumination and the light within and the philological, exegetical endeavors of those humanist scholars who examined texts in the light of their own reason and patiently acquired critical and linguistic skills. The world views generated by these very different forms of Humanism led to a deep ideological divide over religious, social, and scientific issues. The issue that concerns us here is the scientific debate between Paracelsians and Galenists, but, as this and subsequent chapters reveal, science, or in this case medical theory, cannot be separated from larger social and intellectual questions.[15]

As one of the leading Paracelsians of his generation, J.B. van Helmont had nothing positive to say about his Galenic opponents. He attacked and ridiculed them on an intellectual, moral, and institutional level. Like his mentor Paracelsus, he was neither modest in presenting his opinions nor restrained in his language. His condescending and at times rebarbative attitude so infuriated the medical establishment that an acrimonious battle of books began, which did not end well for the elder van Helmont.

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[13] Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, 10 September 1659. *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, I: 176-177.

[14] The idea that scientists in the Renaissance and early modern period rejected printed books for the "book of nature" is simply not true as Eisenstein has shown in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, pt. 3, "The Book of Nature Transformed." The fact that van Helmont edited his father's works for publication and wrote and published so many books is additional evidence that his statement is not to be taken literally. On the subject of radicalism and the theme of rejecting book learning, see Elmer, *The Library of Dr. John Webster*.

[15] For an illuminating discussion of the two conflicting types of humanism, see Hannaway, *Chemists and the Word*, pp. 53-4 and passim.

One of the major bones of contention between Paracelsians and Galenists was over the cause and cure of diseases. The Galenists followed Aristotle in conceiving of matter as consisting of the four qualities, hot, cold moist, and dry, which made up the four elements, earth, air, water, and fire. These four elements corresponded to the four humors, blood (air), phlegm (water), choler (fire), and black choler or melancholy (earth). Health required a balance of these four humors, while disease was caused by their imbalance. There was therefore no concept of *diseases* among Galenists, only of *disease*; and this was not a positive entity in its own right, but a negative state resulting from the imbalance of humors.

According to Galenists, one of the principal causes of disease was catarrh. Catarrh was a cold, watery humor, or phlegm, produced in three stages: first, vapors ascended from the hot stomach to the cold brain; the brain then acted much like a roof on a warm house or the lid on a pot of boiling water, allowing the ascending vapors to condense; once condensed, these vapors trickled down into the body, causing all manner of disagreeable ills in the nose, lungs, joints, bones, and organs. Catarrh was essentially a kind of poisonous excrement that destroyed the balance of humors.

Given their diagnosis of disease, Galenic physicians resorted to therapeutic treatments aimed at restoring the balance of humors. This could be done positively by prescribing certain foods and diets. Since food also consisted of humors, the goal of the physician was to prescribe those which would augment a patient's deficient humors or decrease predominant ones. When Sir Andrew comments in *Twelfth Night* (I, iii), "I am a great eater of beefe, and I believe that does harme to my wit," he is thinking like a Galenist. Other forms of Galenic therapy were purging and bleeding, which were designed to draw off excessive humors.

Paracelsians had nothing but scorn for these core concepts of Galenic medicine. In a bit of doggerel the elder van Helmont ridiculed Galenic diagnostic techniques, which mostly consisted of examining a patient's urine and feces for evidence of an imbalance of humors: "Excrementitious dung and Urine piss/ are of Physitians, the chief dainty-dish."[16] Not only did the Paracelsians and Helmontians disparage the medical practices of Galenic physicians, but they attributed them to the worst possible motives: "Our wish is that . . . they [Galenic physicians] would. . . no more attempt. . . to dreigne the hopes, bodies, veins, strength and purses of the sick."[17] Denying the existence of humors, van Helmont went so far as to attribute their fabrication to the devil himself, an assertion bound to infuriate the medical establishment: "for truly Humours are destructive Ignorances, sluggishnesses, introduced by the Father of lies, and celebrated by the loose credulity of his followers."[18] If humors did not exists, neither did catarrh, a fact which van Helmont was pleased to point out in a treatise with the abrasive title:

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[16] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 875.
[17] J.B. van Helmont, *Deliramenta Catarrhi*, p. 8.
[18] J.B. van Helmont, *Opuscula*, p. 1023.

Deliramenta Catarrhi: or, the Incongruities, Impossibilities and Absurdities couched under the Vulgar Opinion of Defluxions. In this tract he ridicules the whole concept of vapors on the grounds that there simply are no spaces in the head to accommodate the purported trickle down effect. Since both humors and catarrhs are Galenic fictions, cures based on diet, purging, and bleeding are worthless to the patient; they merely serve to line the pockets of avaricious physicians:

> It is a frivolous thing in a . . . plague, to nourish a whole country with the fleshes of the Stork, which flies away about the *Autumn*; or with a Lyons Tongue, hung on the body. For all such things discover ignorant boasting, but not a common charity, in so miserable a greed: For neither hath Hippocrates chased away the plague out of Greece by such remedies: for otherwise, the poor man (if the plague should be put to flight by precious remedies and vituals) should with the despairing of his life, the unequality of fortune, much bewailing. . . and just grief, ponder God to be a respecter of persons and remedies to be denied unto him.[19]

The elder van Helmont's concern for the poor was a hallmark of Paracelsian medicine and a theme that often comes up in the writings of his son. Paracelsianism was marked by a radical equalitarianism. Just as Luther argued for the priesthood of all believers, Paracelsus undermined the rationale for class distinctions with his claim that all men had equal access to divine wisdom inasmuch as every man was a microcosm and possessed within himself knowledge of the greater world. Paracelsus called for an end to the social distinctions separating physicians from apothecaries and surgeons. In the same way that Luther considered each individual's "calling," or occupation, equally valid in the eyes of God, Paracelsus believed that all men took part in the cosmic drama of world redemption.[20] This, as we shall see, became a cardinal feature of the younger van Helmont's mature philosophy.

The point that the elder van Helmont and all Paracelsians stress in their attacks on Galenic medicine is that humors and catarrhs are not the cause of disease, but the pathological products of diseased bodies. There is no point in attempting to remove these products unless the cause is dealt with as well. To van Helmont, the Galenists are like someone who treats a wounded finger without removing the thorn that caused the wound. Oswald Croll, another Paracelsian, says much the same thing, using a different analogy: Galenic physicians are like people who would extinguish a flame but leave the burning coal.[21]

The claim that diseases are caused by specific entities that attack specific organs marks a positive contribution to medical theory. For Paracelsians there are many different diseases, each with its own life cycle and specific pathological effects. This concept of diseases as active, independent entities

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[19] J.B. van Helmont, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, in *Opuscula*, p. 1098.

[20] Goldammer, "Paracelsische Eschatologie."

[21] Croll, "Admonitory Preface," p. 43. Cited in Hannaway, *The Chemists and the Word*, p. 37.

led Paracelsus and J.B. van Helmont to several strikingly modern ideas: 1) diseases can lie dormant in the body until suitable conditions arise to activate them; this suggests something like an incubation period,[22] and 2) certain diseases are more likely to attack certain people in certain places. Paracelsus was the first person to write a complete monograph on an occupational disease. In his *Von der Bergsucht und anderen Bergkrankeiten* he describes the pathological conditions affecting the lungs and organs of miners as a result of their inhalation of mercury vapor.[23]

As progressive as these ideas were, we have yet to consider how Paracelsians explained the etiology of disease in concrete terms. How, in other words, does a specific disease attach itself to and affect a particular organ? From a modern perspective, the answer given has more to do with psychology than medicine proper. Both Paracelsus and van Helmont argue that diseases cannot affect the body in a straightforward, physical way. Diseases are products of the imagination. Van Helmont denied that material or mechanical explanations of physical events are possible. This was, of course, a hotly debated issue in the seventeenth century. Van Helmont aligned himself with the vitalists and argued that what we call matter only exists as certain specific entities organized by the ideas within them: "there is not a certain indistinct hyle or matter, which never existed, nor will be in nature."[24] Van Helmont criticizes the ancient atomists and the scholastic philosophers influenced by them for believing that nature was formed from inert matter and consequently amenable to mathematical and mechanistic explanations: "What will the Schools do, which are accustomed to subscribe so much to Pagans, whose doctrine is wont to imitate, not nature but science mathematical it self in artificial things."[25] Although he would have been the last to admit it, or perhaps even realize it, van Helmont was profoundly influenced by the Aristotelian doctrine that "form" is inherent in matter and inseparable from it. Like Aristotle, he believed that there is a principle within each material body that determines its life history:

> the seminal efficient cause containeth the Types or Patterns of things to be done by it self, the figure, motions, hours, respects, inclinations, fitnesses, equalizings, proportions, alienation, defect, and whatsoever falls in under the succession of dayes, as well in the business of generation, as of government.[26]

Borrowing from the vocabulary of Paracelsus, van Helmont called this life principle the *archeus* (Greek for a beginning, origin, first cause). Complex organisms, like animals or humans, contain many *archei*, which control

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[22] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 387.

[23] It should be pointed out, however, that the idea that diseases are the result of the invasion or penetration of external forces was not necessarily modern. This was an aspect of ancient and primitive world views and supported the concepts of witchcraft and demonism. See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*.

[24] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 1102.

[25] ibid., p. 393.

[26] ibid., p. 29.

various organs and limbs. Like soldiers under a general, these are controlled by a supreme *archeus*.

Van Helmont's scientific thought is essentially an elaboration of the role which these non-material forces, or *archei*, play in nature. In arguing that material bodies can have no effect whatsoever on each other, van Helmont made use of ancient ideas about the power of the imagination and the role of spirits. These ideas continued to be influential throughout the seventeenth century. As we shall see, they played an important part in medicine, in the debate about language, and in the philosophy of Leibniz.

The example van Helmont gives to explain the interaction between *archei* is of a man who thrusts his hand into a pail of pitch. He denies that the man's hand becomes black because the material particles of the pitch stick to it, but attributes the blackness to the effect the *archeus* in the pitch has on the *archeus* in the hand:

> So it is altogether necessary, that he which toucheth Pitch should be defiled by it: That is, it behoveth the Archeus himself, primarily, and immediately to conceive, and put on that new Image, to be affected with the same, and by virtue of a resembling mark or Symbole, other things depending on him, according to the properties of the hurtfull idea.[27]

Exactly the same process occurs in the case of disease. The alienation of the *archeus* of a body or organ through the influence of an "idea morbosa" is the true cause of illness, not imbalanced humors or fluxating catarrhs:

> A disease. . . is a certain Being, bred after. . . a certain hurtfull strange power hath violated the vital Beginning, and hath stirred up the Archeus into indignation, fury, Fear, etc. . . the anguish and troubles of which perturbations do by imagining, stir up an idea co-like. . . themselves, and a due Image: Indeed that Image is readily stamped, expressed and sealed in the Archeus, and being cloathed with him, a disease doth presently enter on the Stage.[28]

As specific entities, diseases have their own life rhythms, and it is the job of the physician to study and cure these through careful observation. Unlike Galenic physicians, who could make diagnoses from urine samples in the comfort of their own homes, Paracelsians had to be by the bedside.

With their new concept of the etiology of disease came new therapies. Since diseases are caused by morbid ideas, remedies must be designed to stir up healthful ideas in the disturbed *archeus*.[29] And just as diseases are specific entities, so are remedies, which must therefore be carefully prescribed. Paracelsus is primarily remembered for his advocacy of chemical, as opposed to vegetable, medicines. Such chemical remedies are necessary because Paracelsians believed that diseases cause chemical changes.

Having denied that materialistic explanations account for the activities of a healthy or diseased body, the elder van Helmont had to explain how non-material ideas could be the cause of physical changes. This was a troubling

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[27] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 536.
[28] ibid., p. 552.
[29] ibid., p. 582.

question that exercised a great many philosophers writing before and after him. Van Helmont's solution lay in identifying various spirits of different degrees of subtlety, which the soul, or *archeus*, employed to direct the body towards some specific end.[30] For example, the "vital spirit" was the medium through which a thought in the soul was passed to the body: "The *vitall Spirit* in the throne of flesh and blood, that is the outward man, sits viceroy to the *Soule*, and acts by her commission."[31] The vital spirit was not the first instrument of the soul, however. There was another more rarefied spirit that emanated directly from the soul itself:

> The *Soule* therefore, by essense wholly *spirituall*, could by no means move, inform, and actuate the *vitall spirit* (which truely carries something of *corporeity* and bulk) much lesse excite and give locomotion to flesh and blood; unlesse some *naturall*, yet *magicall* and *spirituall* power inhaerent in the *soule*, did streame down from the *soule*, as from the first motor, upon the spirit, and so descend to the body.[32]

Every created thing possessed spirits to some degree, even inanimate objects, like pitch, otherwise there could be no interaction between bodies. Man, however, as the image of God and apex of creation, has been blessed with the most subtle and potent spirit of all:

> Hitherto Have I suspended the revealment of a grand mystery: namely, to bring it home to the hand of reason, that in man there sits enthroned a *noble energy*, whereby he is endowed with a capacity to act *extra se*, without and beyond the narrow territories of himself, only *per nutum*, by his single beck, and by the natural magick of his *phansie*, and to transmit a subtil and invisible *virtue*, a certain influence, that doth afterward subsist and perservere *per se*, and operate, upon an object removed at very large distances.[33]

With the kind of exhilaration and wonder Pico had expressed in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, van Helmont here describes man as a Magus. He qualifies this statement, however. In origin man is a Magus, but sin has enfeebled his powers. They may be restored only through the gift of divine illumination:

> This *science* therefore and Magicall power in Man, acting only *per nutum*, intuitively, grew dormant and evirate, from that minute the *Science* (or rather nescience) of the *Apple* was drunk in; and while this malignant *Counterscience* of the forbidden fruit (that is, of flesh and blood, of the outward man, and darknesse) growes up and flourishes, the more noble *Magical power withers*, is ploughed up and buryed in the rubbish of sensuality. But in regard ever now and then the science of the Apple is suspended and chained up in the leaden fetters of sleep; hence it is also that sometimes our dreams are prophetical, and that often God himself vouchsafeth to make a nearer approach and familiar visit to the son of man, in dreams and abstracted vision of the night.[34]

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[30] For a discussion of spirits, see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic.*
[31] J.B. van Helmont, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, p. 58
[32] ibid., pp. 58-59.
[33] ibid., p. 87.
[34] ibid., pp. 59-60.

The idea that spirits exist which provide the soul with the means to influence its own as well as other bodies was commonly accepted at the time J.B. van Helmont wrote. Once again, Paracelsians took their cue from Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, and Kabbalists.

As Koyré has said, "we are all Cartesians, whether we want to be or not."[35] It is therefore difficult for us to grasp the concept of spiritualized matter that crops up continually not only in the writings of Paracelsians but also in many other mystics and philosophers. The Plotinian doctrine of creation as a process of emanation from a single spiritual entity entailed the notion of continuity between spirit and matter.[36] Later writers, particularly Neoplatonists like Ficino, Telesio, and Campanella, tended to make the spirit a bridge between the two and eliminate souls altogether, a practice that Paracelsians followed. As we have seen, the elder van Helmont denied that there was such thing as "indistinct hyle or matter." His discovery of gas encouraged his belief that the operative units in nature consisted of entities that were simultaneously matter and spirit, similar to gas.[37] The concept of spiritualized matter was a central concept in the philosophy of the younger van Helmont, who found the idea reiterated in the Kabbalah.

As we have seen, Paracelsians rejected mechanical or material explanations of nature. Only spirits can act on spirits. When describing exactly how these interactions occur, they draw upon numerous theories readily at hand: the Neoplatonic *anima mundi* and astral body, the Stoic *pneuma*, and even Galenic medical spirits were all spiritual forces utilized to explain how bodies interact. Paracelsians believed in the power of the imagination. They followed in the tradition of Avicenna rather than Aquinas, maintaining that the imagination could act immediately on objects even at a great distance. They accepted the idea that the imagination of a mother had the power to affect her offspring. This idea was not discredited until the eighteenth century. As late as 1713 a report appeared in *L'Histoire de L'Academie Royale des Sciences* of a child born with a beef kidney for a head because its mother could not satisfy her craving for kidneys.

Paracelsians believed the imagination worked through a kind of sympathetic emanation. Like so many of van Helmont's ideas under which his son grew up, this was in no way novel itself, but the way van Helmont elaborated it was. He used the idea of a spirit to explain the occult practices of witchcraft, magic, magnetism, and sympathetic medicine. He even made the grave error of applying analogical arguments drawn from his ideas about spirits to explain in natural terms effects the Catholic Church was bound to insist were supernatural–such as exorcism and the miraculous healing power of relics. (He attributed the effectiveness of both primarily to the power an

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[35] Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 113.

[36] Plotinus is neither consistent nor clear about the exact relationship between spirit and matter. Indeed, he is not clear about whether or not matter truly exists. See, for example, the conflicting statements on the subject in *Enneads* I.8.

[37] Newman, "The Corpuscular Theory of J.B. van Helmont.'

excited imagination had on the body, through the spirits.[38]) Eventually the Inquisition put him under arrest and questioned him on all these points.

The Church was particularly interested in his discussion of the innate power that enabled man to act *per nutum;* the clerics wanted to know how it was awakened, naturally or diabolically? Van Helmont insisted it was a completely natural power. He cites reproduction as an example of the role ideas play in producing corporeal entities, and what could be a more natural act than that?

> The *Phansie*, excited by the orgasmus or heat of *lust*, produceth a slender *reality* or *ideal entity*, which when the soul hath clothed with *corporeity* (for the action of the minde, while it remains immured in walls of flesh, always tends downward and outward) it instantly diffuseth this new *ideal entity* into the liquor of the *seed*, which without this impregnation had still continued barren and devoid of any *Plastique* power: which action is performed as it were by an alienation of the *minde*, the will being ravished, by the true Magick of the outward man, into a kind of short *extasie*, in which there happens a communication or bequest of a certaine *Mentall light* to the entity descending into the body or masse of *seed*.[39]

When van Helmont went on to explain the other ways this ostensibly natural power worked, several questionable elements slipped in, which the holy fathers interpreted as diabolism.[40] Eventually he was forced to concede that Satan could stir up the ecstatic power in man and that it was therefore not at all times natural.[41]

The controversy over the "weapon salve" provides another illustration of van Helmont's conviction that spiritual forces are the only active agents in nature. As this has been described at some length by Allen Debus,[42] it is only necessary to point out that the weapon salve, as its name suggests, was applied to the weapon or discarded bandage rather than to the wound itself. The rationale for this procedure lay in Gilbert's work on magnetism. A magnetic attraction was thought to exist between the blood on the weapon or bandage and the blood still coursing through the veins of the wounded person. The magnetic attraction ensured that an efflux of spiritual matter communicated between the two bloods, carrying the healing power of the salve with it. The cure was not painless. Sir Kenelm Digby, who first used it, was said to have made his patients wince in pain simply by powdering the knives that cut them. It is disquieting to know that this theory lay behind the practice of taking wounded dogs to sea in the hope that communication

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[38] J.B. van Helmon, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, pp. 26-27; Broeckx, "Interrogatoires," p. 18 and passim.

[39] J.B. van Helmont, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, pp. 74-75. William Harvey's discussion of conception has striking similarities to van Helmont's. He thought the womb looked and acted very much like the brain and that the semen did not affect it physically but produced a non-physical impression, somewhat like a thought, which caused the womb to conceive. Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas*, pp. 270ff.

[40] Broeckx, "Interrogatoires," pp. 15-16.

[41] ibid., p. 43.

[42] Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy.*

between the wounded animal and the blood on the weapon or dressing left on land would help in determining longitude![43]

Van Helmont found himself in a great deal of trouble with the Inquisition for defending the weapon salve. He played into the hands of his Galenic opponents, who were intent on silencing him. The Inquisition placed him under house arrest for two years. His interrogators were interested in establishing how van Helmont could defend the action of the weapon salve as "natural" when action at such a distance, if not miraculous, must be diabolical. The Inquisitors were extremely critical of van Helmont's statement that the weapon salve occurred naturally in exactly the same way that miracles did.[44]

The weapon salve controversy is just one of many examples illustrating the belief common to Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, Kabbalists, Paracelsians, and occultists of all stripes that the world consists of a network of sympathies and antipathies. The ancient roots of this belief, along with it heretical implications, have been analyzed by D. P. Walker and will come up frequently in the following chapters.[45] One of the major heretical aspects of this way of thinking is that for Paracelsus and his followers the true physician is a semi-divine being involved in a cosmic process of redemption through the manipulation of these sympathetic forces. The influence of alchemy is obvious in this regard, for the alchemist was thought to have a redemptive and even creative role. Kabbalists played an identical role. Rejecting the traditional Aristotelian view that nature provides the norm for art, alche-mists, Paracelsians, Kabbalists, and magicians believed that through art they could intervene and accelerate the natural processes and perfect or redeem matter. The English Aristotelian John Case criticized Paracelsians for holding this view. He believed they had falsely set themselves above nature by not realizing that art must follow nature.[46]

Galenic physicians were quite naturally appalled and incensed by Paracelsus, van Helmont, and their followers not simply because of what they said but because of the manner in which they said it. Thomas Erastus, for example, was so enraged by Paracelsus's defamatory attack on Galenic medicine that he answered in kind in a long treatise entitled *Disputationum de medicina nova Phillippi Paracelsi* (1572). Erastus was sufficiently provoked to emulate Paracelsus's habit of making scurrilous *ad hominem*

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[43] Sobel, *Longitude*, pp. 41-2: ". . . countless cranks and opportunists published pamphlets to promulgate their own hare-brained schemes for finding longitude at sea.

Surely the most colorful of the offbeat approaches was the wounded dog theory, put forth in 1687. It was predicated on a quack cure called powder of sympathy. . . . Send aboard a wounded dog as a ship sets sail. Leave ashore a trusted individual to dip the dog's bandage into the sympathy solution every day at noon. The dog would perforce yelp in reaction, and thereby provide the captain a time cue. The dog's cry would mean, 'the Sun is upon the Meridian in London.' The captain could then compare that hour to the local time on ship and figure the longitude accordingly."

[44] Van Helmont's run in with the Spanish Inquisition is discussed Mévergnies, *Jean-Baptiste van Helmont*, pp. 123-30, as well as in Broeckx, "Interrogatoires."

[45] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*.

[46] Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance*.

remarks. (The level of vituperation characteristic of debates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries make modern debates pale by comparison.) Erastus relished stories about Paracelsus's personal failings. Relying on Oporinus's account of his brief apprenticeship with Paracelsus, Erastus described the way Paracelsus habitually fell into bed drunk, fully clothed and armed, often to awaken with a terrifying leap in the air, eyes ablaze and sword drawn. And he repeated with evident relish Oporinus's surmise that Paracelsus was not sexually normal.

Andreas Libavius was another critique of the claims to illumination made by Paracelsians, and he too was appalled by their attack on hallowed social institutions and conventions. Although he was willing to accept many of the chemical discoveries of the Paracelsians, he was greatly concerned with defending institutionalized learning against what he saw as the nihilistic onslaught of its Paracelsians critics. In the first of what became three volumes of letters on chemical subjects addressed to philosophers and physicians throughout Germany, Libavius writes to a young friend, warning him of the potential dangers to his health, social position, and scholarly reputation that will inevitably result from his interest in Paracelsian philosophy. Like Erastus, Libavius emphasizes the impiety and arrogance of Paracelsus and his followers. He is especially critical of their claim to have the God-like ability to perfect nature. Libavius was a schoolmaster, and as Hannaway comments, his "principle mission in life was to keep the world safe for schoolmasters." While schoolmasters might play God, they certainly do not expect their pupils to.[47]

Paraclesians and Helmontians were an anathema to Libavius because they rejected his pedagogical approach. They were not interested in knowing how things worked. They were even less interested in knowing what the most reputable authorities had to say about how things worked. Their goal was to discover the hidden forms and essences behind the world of appearances. In this they followed in the footsteps of the proponents of the natural magic tradition. As Hannaway so aptly points out, Paracelsus did not outline a natural philosophy as much as describe a "natural gnosis."[48] Paracelsianism was a radical gnostic philosophy predicated on the conviction that man was a microcosm reflecting within himself the macrocosm or world at large. Knowledge came from looking within oneself, through the imaginative identification of the mind with the objects already in it, not from careful reasoning on the data provided by the senses. This kind of turning inward to obtain knowledge was the activity the younger van Helmont had recommended to Hartlib when he said that "the best and most solid knowledge comes from within a man" and from "knowing ourselves, and those things, that lye hid in us."

Paracelsus and his followers were after the true core of existence, and they did not believe this could be grasped by relying on the word of the

[47] Hannaway, *Chemists and the Word*, p. 81.
[48] ibid., pp. 59-60.

ancients or by discovering mechanical laws. They were not humanists content to argue and refine ancient sources, but occultists in the true sense of the term, searching for the hidden causes of things through divine illumination, intuition, and the inner light. They rejected Aristotelian and Scholastic epistemology with its emphasis on reason and logic, firmly convinced that such an approach only touched the surface of things.[49] Following Paracelsus, the elder van Helmont developed a theory of knowledge that contains elements of the Platonic conception of innate ideas blended with a firm skepticism reminiscent of Montaigne, and a mystical emphasis on divine illumination. He accepted the common Platonic and Neoplatonic view that intuition is the highest form of knowledge and placed discursive reasoning well below it. In his mind knowledge consists in the intuitive, therefore immediate, recollection of innate ideas:

> I concluded with my self, first, that reason doth generate nothing but a dim or dark Knowledge, or a thinking. Then next, that the Knowledge's of the truth of things, and premises, do proceed, not indeed from Reason; but from a far different beginning, to wit, the intellectual light of the Lamp or Candle.
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> Wherefore I straightway observed, that the discourse of Reason, doth extenuate or lessen, overshadow, hinder, and choke that noble act of understanding, whereby the knowledge of the premises, are implanted in us.[50]

Along with Montaigne and others, van Helmont denied that man can be defined as a rational creature since other creatures, for example, bees and wolves, are also rational. Reason is, in fact, a product and consequence of the fall: "[Reason]. . . is properly nothing else, but a wording faculty of discoursing, co-bred with us as mortals from sin."[51] Alluding to the myth of Proteus,[52] van Helmont maintains that the understanding transforms itself into the thing to be understood:

> I have known, likewise, that an easie translation of the understanding was required, and a pleasing transchanging of it self into the form of the things intelligible; in which point of time indeed, the understanding for a moment is made (as it were) the intelligible thing it self.[53]

The understanding is able to do this because, as we have seen, the thing to be understood is already in the intellect: "Our Soul understanding it self, doth after a sort, understand all other things, because all other things, are in an intellectual manner in the Soul, as in the Image of God."[54] The concept of man as the microcosm, who reflected the macrocosm, provided the rationale for Pico della Mirandola's optimistic assessment of the human potential to become divine. Although the elder van Helmont accepted the same analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm as Pico, he did not share his

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[49] J.B. van Helmont, "Logica inutilis," *Oriatrike*, p. 18. Bacon said much the same thing in *Novum Organum*, I, ii

[50] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 18.

[51] ibid.

[52] ibid., p. 23.

[53] ibid., p. 22.

[54] ibid., p. 25.

optimism about the power and perspicacity of the human mind. Living after the Reformation, his view of man was inevitably colored both by the growth of skepticism and by the Protestant emphasis on man's fallen nature and need for grace.[55] There is a basic difference between his philosophy and that of the Renaissance Neoplatonists in the repeated emphasis he places on man's fall and consequent need for divine illumination.

> But whether the light (of understanding) be altogether supernatural, or that the understanding be of its own nature thus kindled, or enflamed, I had rather experience than determine. That one thing at least, I know, that it doth not happen without grace.[56]

It is not enough for man to seek knowledge, God must help; and so dreams and visions find their place in his epistemology:

> For oftentimes, some one being sunk into the middle of his Dreams, forthwith conceives a Knowledge, which being awake, he had never attained: For Night unto Night showeth Knowledge. So oftentimes, some one reads a place that was many times read without Fruit, from whence at length he begins a more reformed Life. For do not those things descend from the Father of Lights?[57]

Man must offer his whole self to God, he must "will, act, and suffer anything, with a total amorous offering up of the heart, soul, and strength into the obedience of the Divine Will."[58] Only then will he gain knowledge: "whether the understanding be transformed, or whether it doth transform it self into the Image of the thing understood, surely it had need of help from God."[59] The emphasis van Helmont places on the "heart" and on divine illumination as a source of knowledge became the defining characteristic of the new forms of spiritualism that proliferated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is another indication of how closely entwined religion and science were in the early modern period.

Although deeply affected by the arguments of skeptics, the Paracelsians never embraced skepticism. Instead of taking the positivistic, pragmatic approach to knowledge of constructive skeptics like Libavius, Mersenne, Gassendi, and Locke, they sought a new basis of absolute truth in intuitive knowledge, which they continued to believe capable of revealing the essential nature and truth of things. These different epistemological approaches become a major issue in the debate about language and science discussed in subsequent chapters.

Paracelsus described the process of obtaining intuitive knowledge as one of "overhearing" (*ablauschen*), and he explained it in terms of his doctrine of "signatures." The only way to discover the "signatures" or essential nature of things is through experience and experiment both within ourselves and in the

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[55] Popkin, *The History of Scepticsim from Erasmus to Descartes*.

[56] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, pp. 32ff.

[57] ibid., Preface, "To the Medical Loving Reader," before "Opuscula Medica Inaudita," last unnumbered page.

[58] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatriake*, p. 314.

[59] ibid., p. 23.

external world. "He who wishes to explore nature," says Paracelsus in a favorite aphorism, "must tread her books with his feet." This was hardly a novel idea. The concept of the book of nature as the word of God had been a commonplace of medieval preaching, intended for an illiterate audience. But Paracelsus gave the notion a radical, even revolutionary, emphasis by dismissing all written authority. He encouraged individuals to interpret the book of nature on their own, especially when it came to medicine. Once again, one finds a strong parallel between this scientific approach and the Protestant emphasis on the individual's experience of God. Paracelsus believed that nature was constantly changing to meet the needs of new ages. Diseases and their remedies come and go and are found in one place and not another. Reliance on tradition is therefore useless and men must rely on their own investigations. The elder van Helmont shared this approach: "the Gods do fell Arts to Sweats, not to readings alone."[60] This preference for experimental learning rather than books is characteristic of the younger van Helmont as well.

Paracelsians and Helmontians were not the only natural philosophers to advocate or engage in experimentation, and it is open to question just how much they actually achieved in comparison with experimentally inclined Aristotelians like Harvey or mechanical philosophers like Boyle. The problem was that in most scientific fields until relatively recently, and certainly throughout the seventeenth century, the gap between the advocacy and practice of experiment was enormous.[61] This can be illustrated in the case of van Helmont. Criticizing those who objected to his book on the magnetic cure of wounds, he advised them to experiment before they dared to dismiss his theory:

> It is not agreeable to the custom of Naturalists, to argue from bare Authorities. . . make Tryall therefore, and call any of the recited examples [of magnetic and sympathetic effects] to the touch stone of experiment, that so you prove us guilty of falsehood; if you cannot, then at least come over to our side and believe them.[62]

There is not a modern scientist who would disagree with this injunction, at least until he or she understood the kind of crucial experiment van Helmont had in mind. A witch, he says, who has killed a horse by magic can be detected by burning the horse's heart impaled upon an arrow because her spirit will suffer the same intolerable sense of burning. He claims that "the effect holds constantly good, and never fails to succeed upon experiment."[63]

The claim so frequently made by Paraclesians and Helmontians that they alone were divinely inspired and consequently had a more profound insight into nature was bound to antagonize Galenists and raise the same thorny problems facing Protestants in their own claims to divine truth. What con-

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[60] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 523.
[61] ibid., pp. 11-14.
[62] J.B. van Helmont, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, p. 36.
[63] ibid., p. 65

stitutes divine illumination and what proof is there that any one individual possesses it? Erastus dismisses Paracelsus's pretended illumination as nothing but the inspiration of lying spirits,[64] a common enough charge against Protestants as well as dissident Catholics. The Inquisition pointedly asked the elder van Helmont how he could be sure his illumination came from good rather than evil spirits without the guidance of tradition or reason? In the end, van Helmont was forced like so many others to concede that study, discussion, and praxis, in other words, the whole apparatus of traditional learning resting on accepted authority, were more certain guides to knowledge than illumination.

As a reformer with an unshakable faith in his cause, J.B. van Helmont was neither modest nor moderate in setting forth his theories. Like most zealous innovators, he both anticipated his own martyrdom and helped to realize it. His personal sacrifice to the cause of science was not as great as some, but his philosophy did become a cross he was forced to bear. In a poignant passage, and one of the few in which he mentions his private affairs, van Helmont describes the death of his two eldest sons. He lays this disaster at the feet of his enemies, and accepted it with a fortitude bred from the unshakable conviction that he would be proven right in the end:

> For indeed, the plague privily entered my own house, through a Chamber-maid; she forthwith recovered: Both my Eldest sons being sore troubled in their mind, shew an undaunted courage, and concealed, that they were vexed with a continual combat of sighing at the mouth of their stomach: and when as through the wiles and framed deceits of my prevalent Enemies, I was detained at my own house under prevention of an Arrest, both my Sons also, would not by forsaking me, go into the Country: and since they had observed at other times, that they were refreshed by swimming, in the midst of Summer, they swam thrice without my knowledge; whence transpiration through the pores being stopped up, both of them being forthwith developed into a Fever, together with a dejected appetite, pain of the head, and a *Catochus* or unsensible detainment of the Soul, with a pricking of the whole body, they died among Nuns, swearing that they would admit of my remedies: but after that they had received my Sons, they refused forraign remedies. . . and the loss of these my Sons, I frequently behold, as if it were present; and thou mayest suppose that it gave a beginning unto this Treatise. I leave vengeance unto my Lord, who I humbly beseech, that he would spare my Enemies, and bestow upon them the light of Repentence.[65]

Walter Pagel was one of the first of van Helmont's biographers to point out the profound importance his religious beliefs had on his scientific achievement.[66] The firm belief that "ratio" was tied up with pride and atheism spurred his rebellion against Scholasticism and Galenism and turned him towards experiment and observation. This in turn led him to deprecate the theory of the four elements and the humors and to develop a dynamic theory of matter which saw diseases as specific entities attacking specific organs.

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[64] *Disputationum de medicina nova Phillippi Paracelsi*, pt. 2, p. 24

[65] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 1135.

[66] Pagel, "The Debt of Science and Medicine to a Devout Belief in God."

His belief in God as the supreme and all-powerful creator caused him to scoff at materialistic explanations of natural events and to take account of psychical and psychological factors. His deprecation of reason let him to appreciate subconscious and autonomous nervous systems. Finally, his emphasis on specificity made him hostile to explanations in terms of astrological forces and analogies that were imprecise and unverifiable.[67] In these ways van Helmont was in advance of his contemporaries. Although it is undeniably true that he was steeped in the alchemical and occult traditions of his predecessors, he was able to forge a new philosophy from these sources which stimulated following generations of natural philosophers—men like Robert Boyle, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and, of course, his own son.

Van Helmont's religious bias was not wholly beneficial, however. His assumptions often colored his conclusions and prevented him from appreciating profoundly important discoveries. The most glaring examples of this are his apparent failure to take note of Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood or Copernicus's reorganization of the solar system. Pagel suggests that he was incapable of appreciating Harvey's discovery because of his inherent lack of interest in the application of mechanical laws to biological phenomena.[68] The same distaste for mechanistic or mathematical theories probably caused him to ignore Çopernicus. It would have to wait for Boyle and Leibniz to try to combine the best aspects of van Helmont's theories with the mechanical philosophy. As I shall argue, Leibniz was able to do this partly because of his close relationship with the younger van Helmont.

It is also apparent that some of van Helmont's medical remedies were rooted in popular religious beliefs. His remedy for a long and dangerous labor, for example, is the liver and gall of an eel powdered and drunk in wine. The liver and gall of a serpent would be even more effective, he thought, since the Bible says that women will bring forth in pain because of Eve's dealings with the serpent.[69]

J.B. van Helmont lived in an unsettled age, and his work reflects the contradictions and confusions of the time. The Renaissance concept of man as a Magus able to control and understand the universe retreated before Luther's and Calvin's pessimism and their insistence on man's sinful nature and abject helplessness. Van Helmont's work benefited from this conflict in attitudes. On the one hand man was still a potential Magus who could look to

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[67] For an appreciation of J.B. van Helmont's contribution to science see Partington, "Jan Baptista van Helmont."

[68] Pagel, *Joan Baptista. van Helmont*, p. 124, n. 1.

[69] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 306. The difficulty of determining what cures were effective and what were not was, of course, a crucial problem at the time. Robert Boyle recorded that William Harvey used the following cure suggested by van Helmont: "as rigid a naturalist as he is, [Harvey] scrupled not often to try the experiment mentioned by Helmont, of curing some tumours or excrescencies, by holding on them for a pretty while (that the cold might thoroughly penetrate) the hand of a man dead of a lingring disease; which experiment the doctor was not long since pleased to tell me, he had sometimes tried fruitfully, but often with good success" (Robert Boyle, *The Usefulness of Experimental Philosophy*, *Works*, II: 167).

the heavens and master the world around him. On the other, original sin made it more appropriate for him to fix his eyes firmly on the ground beneath his feet.[70]

The foundation of Francis Mercury van Helmont's philosophy was laid during the years he worked as his father's assistant and editor. The world views of both father and son belong in the Neoplatonic-Hermetic-kabbalistic tradition that arose in the Renaissance, took refuge in various princely courts and academies during the turbulent period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and reemerged with renewed vigor in the seventeenth century.[71] Their allegiance was to the "third" and gnostic component of western culture, characterized, as we have seen, by the following basic assumptions: 1) the universe is a organic whole with each part mirroring and corresponding to the others. This is especially true of man inasmuch as he is the microcosm and reflects the larger macrocosm. 2) Every part of nature is alive and vital and connected by a network of sympathies and antipathies. There is thus essentially no difference between matter and spirit; they are entities along a single continuum. 3) The universe is not static but in a constant state of change and evolution, during which everything experiences transmutation as it is regenerated and eventually restored to its prelapsarian condition. 4) Human beings are made in God's image and share God's nature. Hence they play a pivotal role in restoring the world to its original perfection. 5) Thought and imagination are powerful forces which allow men to have access to different levels of reality and, through gnosis, to hidden, divine knowledge. 6) Inasmuch as both philosophy and theology arise from one source, God, they cannot be separated. They have existed from all time in a *prisca theologia.* Although partially obscured, this can be rediscovered to provide the basis for a truly ecumenical, peaceful, and harmonious world.[72] Under the impetus of increased contacts between Christians and Jews, new sources of kabbalistic philosophy were grafted into this tradition, bringing with them exhilarating optimism about human power and potential. Francis Mercury van Helmont was a key player in these developments.

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[70] Van Helmont's attitude was paralleled by Francis Bacon. See Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science.*

[71] Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*; Evans, *Rudolph II and his World*; idem, "Learned Societies in Germany in the Seventeenth Century;" Moran, *The Alchemical World of the German Court.*

[72] Faive has characterized this on-going esoteric tradition in western culture in somewhat similar terms in his article, "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism." Cf. Winner, *The Basic Ideas of Occult Wisdom.*

CHAPTER TWO

DIPLOMAT AND COURIER

Like the wandering planet whose name he bore, Francis Mercury van Helmont appeared to follow an erratic path. He spent the years following his father's death travelling back and forth across Europe and England, without a permanent home. Echoing Paracelsus, to whom both he and his father were deeply indebted, he called himself a "wandering eremite"[1] and described his search for "wisemen" from whom he hoped to learn "the ordination of all created things and their harmony":[2]

> I then bent all my Senses, whereby I might make my self known unto Wise men so called, hoping at length, to find some wise man, not learned according to the common manner, in all places where I should passe throw (which I might call Nations:) of whatsoever profession or condition they were, I spake to them according to their desire, that I might joyn in friendship with them by discourse, and according to my abilities, I imparted unto them the whole cause: by this and other means I touched at many clear fundamental Knowledges and Arts; all which, I here advisedly pass by.[3]

In his journeying van Helmont modelled himself on Paracelsus but also, and perhaps more significantly, on Christian Rosenkreuz, the reputed founder of the Rosicrucians, whose *Manifestos* created such a stir shortly after the younger van Helmont's birth. Van Helmont's contemporaries, and this includes Leibniz, actually believed van Helmont was a Rosicrucian, an allegation he denied. For all his travels, however, Francis Mercury remained dissatisfied and, like his father, became disillusioned with the thoughts and methods of his contemporaries:

> and when I understood, all and every one of them, to be only the esteemed workmanship of a great Man, I discerned, that by how much the more a thing was absurd, vain, and foolish or frivolous, by so much the more it was exalted, and respected or honoured; the which servitude I perceiving, became voluntarily averse thereto, as being one who did prosecute plain simplicity.[4]

Van Helmont's disillusionment did not result in his becoming either a hermit (in the true sense of the word) or a pessimist. He never secluded himself, as his father had at Vilvorde, but pursued his studies in the midst of an active career as the adviser, confidant, and emissary of German Princes and Princesses. In the fifteen years following his father's death, Francis Mercury led the life of a courtier and made his reputation as a skilled diplomat.

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[1] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, preface, p. 1.
[2] ibid., p. 2.
[3] ibid.
[4] ibid.

His entree into the courtly circles which later became so familiar to him occurred in Holland where he had gone to publish his father's collected works. At some point between 1644, when he left Vilvorde, and 1648, when J.B van Helmont's writings appeared in Amsterdam, Francis Mercury became acquainted with members of the Palatine family, a talented and colorful group of German Princes and Princesses. They were the sons and daughters of Charles I's sister, Elizabeth, and her husband Frederick V, the Elector of the Palatinate, whose unsuccessful bid for the Bohemian crown precipitated the Thirty Years' War. When van Helmont met the Palatine family, they could boast of little besides their own wits and exalted ancestry. Their wealth and titles had been staked and lost on the Bohemian adventure. After her husband's death, Elizabeth lived in exile with her large family at the Hague. There, nagged by debts but sustained by the hope of her eldest son's restoration to his father's lands, Elizabeth tried to maintain the extravagant and princely life to which she was accustomed.

From 1650 onwards van Helmont became particularly involved with four members of the Palatine family. He offered advice and provided services for the two eldest sons, Karl Ludwig (1617-1680), who eventually did regain his father's lands and the title of Elector, and Rupert (1619-1682), solider, sailor, and scientist, who later became the Duke of Cumberland and died as the Governor of Windsor Castle.[5] At the same time van Helmont became a close friend of the two most distinguished and learned of the Palatine Princesses, Elizabeth (1618-1680), later the Abbess of Herford to whom Descartes dedicated his *Principia Philosophiae*, and Sophie (1630-1714), who later became the Duchess of Hanover, patron of Leibniz, and mother of George I.

A passage in van Helmont's *Memoirs* suggests that he may have accompanied Karl Ludwig on his return to the Palatinate as the Elector in 1649, or joined him soon after. He describes a curious episode at the Palatine castle in Heidelberg when he became sick from inhaling fumes from the wet lime in a newly plastered room.[6] This could have occurred during 1650. The castle at Heidelberg had been so badly damaged during the Thirty Years' War that Karl Ludwig had to wait for a year before the repairs were sufficiently advanced to move in. Even then, construction work on the castle continued.[7]

In 1650 van Helmont received a letter from another "son of the Empire," as he says in his *Memoirs*, asking him if he "would be pleased to call upon him" at some point during his travels through Germany.[8] The prince was Christian August (1622-1708), Duke of Sulzbach, and he was anxious to ask

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[5] Morrah, *Prince Rupert of the Rhine*.

[6] F.M. van Helmont's, *Memoirs*, in "Dr. Foote's Translations of van Helmont's Works," London, British Library, Sloane MS 530, fol. Av. Van Helmont dictated his *Memoirs* to Dr. Daniel Foote, which accounts for the lack of punctuation, deletions, brackets, and insertions.. I quote them as they stand.

[7] Godfrey, *Heidelberg: Its Princes and its Palaces*, p. 311.

[8] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Dr.

van Helmont's help in resolving the conflict between the Lutherans and Catholics in his territories.

Christian August had inherited a delicate religious situation when he succeeded to the Dukedom. His father, August, had been a younger son of Philip Ludwig (c. 1568-1614) of Neuburg and since the law of primogeniture held for the Neuburg lands, August's oldest brother Wolfgang Wilhelm (1578-1653) was first in the line of inheritance. In 1613 Wolfgang Wilhelm converted to Catholicism, much to the dismay of August and his brother Johann Friedrich, who remained Lutherans. After their father's death, Catholicism became the official religion in the territory of Neuburg inherited by Wolgang Wilhelm, while Lutheranism remained the official religion in the lesser territories inherited by his younger brothers. The religious schism in the family became a constant source of tension because Wolfgang Wilhelm claimed to have the ultimate authority and did everything he could to promote Catholicism in his brothers' territories.[9] The Thirty Years' War only exacerbated the problem. By 1627 Neuburg forces controlled Sulzbach. Wolfgang Wilhelm introduced the Counter-Reformation, and his sovereignty over Sulzbach was officially recognized by the Emperor on May 8, 1627. By October, 1627 Lutherans had been dismissed from 57 Churches and eight professors had lost their places at the gymnasium in Sulzbach.[10]

This was the situation the young Christian August inherited at the age of nine when his father died in 1631. Dominated by his uncle, he was bound to accept the prevailing Catholic policy. In 1649, however, at the age of 27, Christian August was restored to his lands by the Peace of Westphalia.[11] In control of his territory for the first time, he reversed his uncle's Catholic policy, restoring Lutheran pastors to their previous positions and employing Protestants as government officials and counselors.[12] However, this reversion obviously did not settle the religious problem, for the very next year Christian August wrote to van Helmont asking for his advice.

It is unlikely that Christian August would have written to van Helmont had he not met him previously and judged him competent to assist in such a delicate affair. Had van Helmont been in Karl Ludwig's service as early as 1649, he and Christian August would have met. In that year Karl Ludwig traveled to Nuremberg to negotiate with the Emperor and the Peace Commissioners those terms in the Peace of Westphalia which restored the lands and title of Elector to the Palatine family. Christian August was also present at Nuremberg during that year, negotiating the restoration of his territories. The stay of the two princes overlapped.[13]

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[9] For a succinct discussion of this complex historical situation, see Wappmann, *Durchbruch der Toleranz*, p. 15ff.

[10] Hollerer, *Pfalzgraf August von Neuburg als Herzog von Sulzbach*, p. 32.

[11] *Aktenmassige Geschichte des Colnischen Vergleichen und des darauf eingefuhrten Simultaneums im Herzogthums Sulzbach*, pp. 2ff.

[12] ibid., p. 5.

[13] Von Meiern, *Acta Pacis Executionis Publica, oder Nurnbergische Friedens-Executions-Handlungen und Geschichte*, I:27: "Le 3 de ce mois [August 1649], le Generalissime les troupes Suedoises accompagné de plusiers officiers, retourna ici de Windsheim: ou est demeuré le

There is also the possibility that van Helmont may have been introduced to Christian August by Dr. Gregorius Hilling (1614-1680), who settled in Weiden (part of the territory in Sulzbach) as city physician, a kind of inspector of public health, in 1649. Hilling and van Helmont met during the late 1640s either at Innsbruck or Salzburg. Van Helmont was a frequent visitor to the court at Innsbruck, where he attended Archduchess Anna de' Medici, the wife of Archduke Karl of the Tyrol, as a physician to help her conceive children.[14] Hilling and van Helmont shared a common interest in medicine, alchemy, and natural philosophy. Hilling had received a degree in medicine and philosophy from Padua in 1641. He built up a famous natural history collection and a portrait gallery of doctors. Both men were also connected to members of the Palatine family. Hilling's family came from Elbogen (now Loker) in western Bohemia. His father, Achatius Hilling (1591-1670), had been caught up in the Rosicrucian furor and expectations surrounding Frederick V's election as King of Bohemia. He had fought for Frederick in the disastrous battle at White Mountain and had followed his leader into exile, settling in Nuremberg.[15]

Van Helmont received Christian August's letter while he was at the Emperor's court in Prague in 1650.[16] As the Emperor Ferdinand III (1608-1657) was greatly interested in alchemy, he may have invited van Helmont to the court with the expectation that with his background he would be able to throw new light on this intriguing and elusive subject. Whatever the reasons for his visit, van Helmont soon left Prague and made his way to Sulzbach. There he became involved in a fascinating intrigue, which, while it nearly cost him his life, reveals van Helmont's life-long concern with promoting religious peace and unity.

At the time he arrived in Sulzbach Christian August was caught between the Catholics and Protestants in his territories and in the beginning stages of a severe spiritual crisis that eventually led to a nervous breakdown. Volker Wappmann considers van Helmont's trip to Sulzbach a crucial turning point in the evolution of Christian August's policy of toleration. He believes that van Helmont helped both to precipitate and resolve the profound crisis that fundamentally altered Christian August's religious views.[17]

The best account of this crisis is found in the reports sent between May and August, 1651 to Christian August's Catholic uncle, Wolfgang Wilhelm, Duke of Neuburg, by his agent and tax collector in Sulzbach, Johann Kaspar Gundermann. The first sign of a crisis appeared when Christian August

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Prince Electeur Palatin. Le 4 le Prince Palatin Auguste de Sulzbach arriva aussi avec sa femme qu'il a amenée de Suede." Windsheim was close to Nuremberg. Karl Ludwig had arrived there on 6th July 1649.

[14] At the request of the Duchess of Hanover, van Helmont used the same medicine he had prescribed for the Archduchess for the Electoress Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici of the Palatinate in 1697 (See the letter from Sophie to Raugrafin Louise, 4 April 1697 in Godemann, hrsg., *Briefe der Kurfürstin Sophie an die Raugräfinen und Raugraften zu Pfalz*, p. 155).

[15] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 69-70.

[16] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Dr.

[17] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 19.

began to act very strangely towards the Catholics in his territories. At the beginning of May, before van Helmont's arrival, he revoked their right to worship and he fired all the Catholics in his service on the grounds that they could not be trusted. He forbid the Franciscans living in Amberg to enter Sulzbach, and he even threatened to imprison Gundermann. By the end of May, Gundermann reported to Philipp Wilhelm that Christian August was "gantz verruckht" (completely crazy). Gundermann was not the only one to reach this conclusion. Ministers and leading citizens also wrote to Christian August's brother, urging him to come quickly and take the place of his incompetent brother.[18] This was the point at which van Helmont arrived in Sulzbach. His meeting with Christian August led to even stranger behavior on the Prince's part. Reports spread of an extremely disturbing incident in the palace gardens. Walking with his wife, who was described as weeping uncontrollably day and night, Christian August called a blind man to him. Taking his cue from The Gospel of John, he smeared the blind man's eyes with spittle mixed with earth, washed his face, and then read several passages from the Bible in a loud voice while laying his hands on the man.[19] This caused much head shaking in Sulzbach, which only increased with the further reports that Christian August was unable to sleep, that he studied day and night, and sat for hours in front of the palace stables, reading the Bible and other religious works to his horses.[20]

The account van Helmont gives in his *Memoirs* of his meeting with Christian August is worth quoting in full. Not only is it characteristic of van Helmont's energetic and discursive narrative style, but it also gives a vivid picture of his character and attitude when faced with a difficult and dangerous problem. As one can surmise, a good number of Christian August's subjects clearly considered van Helmont a dangerous influence on their Prince. But van Helmont was not one to lose his head:

> Being at the Emperor's Court in 1650 a prince of the Empire sent to me a Gentleman with a letter desiring me (since he heard I was lodg'd apart from the Court) that as I pass'd through the Empire I would be pleased to call upon him which accordingly I did, now this prince being a Lutheran, the warrs having driven him out of his Country, and almost an half part of his subjects made Catholicks, and after the peace was made in Germany he had power given to him to reforme the religion by turning out the Catholick Clergy, and supplyed their rooms with Lutherans, when I therefore was arrived at his court among many matters concerning which he was pleased to ask my advice I counseled him that he should divide the Rooms of the Clergy between the religions mentioned, for which peaceable endeavour I gaind afterwards the hatred of both. And because my stay was to be very short, the prince kept me in continuall discourse from dinner time till 6 oclock next morning, when I betook my self to my bed till 12, but the prince employd the whole day and night, for those 6 hours that I slept he wrote down the things he remembered from discourse

[18] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 65.

[19] John 9: 6-7. Christian August was reading Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* during this period, which may help to explain his behavior.

[20] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 66.

with me, and thus incessantly for 6 days without stopping, whereupon I departing left him well but soon after he fell into a coma, and was as in a waking dream or dreaming awake, and talking inconsistently whereupon he fell asleep and slept 24 hours continually, whereupon his wife and mother supposing I had done him some harm, they sent messengers to fetch me back, which they effected, the princesses designing to put me to death, and to that purpose had stirred up all the citizens and prentices and immediately caused the city gates to be shut, and when they were in readiness and in arms they calld me to come to the Court, and as I passed through the gravel street and the marbel towards the Court they all cryed out this is he that is the destroyer of our prince and Country, and the assassination was to be begun first by the prentices, and in order thereto as I passd they rudely pushed me with their elbows but I instead of returning so Evil a treatment, fixed my eye upon one that had an honest look and I saluted him upon which he saluted me again, but others who were at some distance began to throw stones at me, particularly one fellow he hit me on the side of the head with a great stone. At this time I found my reason working in such a manner as I could easily have thrown at variance one party against the other as being of two religions as abovesaid but I was prohibited so to do from the bottom of my heart, which continually supplyed me with advice how I was to proceed from step to step but I never knew any more than the next step so that when my reason became officious I had recourse to my heart again where I had sure direction. Upon their flinging of stones at me I at two severall times (as I was hit) had hold of a man, telling him he knew the man that hit me, and that he should account to me for it whereupon he turned pale for fear and with a trembling voice said I know him not whose voice of fear struck a fear upon the people, I still holding him fast and carrying him with me, and after that I let him go, another stone was flung at me which hit me between my neck and shoulder, whereupon I caught hold of another man and I told him the same as I had told the other, and he with a fearfull voice answered as the other, whereupon a fear again seizing them they open the gate contrary to their order, and I went towards my Inne which was in the Suburbs, and the Superintendent[21] came to me and told me that I should be gone for they would kill me and the sooner the better. I told him that he might carry me before the prince, he answered they would kill me there, then I propos'd I might be put into prison, but that was deny'd me, att last I desired some should guard me but I was told that neither would that be granted me, so I got a Horseback (having first washed the blood) talking with the superintendent they intending to fall upon me as soon as ever he had left me, whereupon with a hurrah I put spurrs to my horse rode quite through them, tho they discharged 3 muskets at me. The prince afterwards awakening and hearing what had passed he told me he would do justice in that matter, but I desired he would not by any means for that all was done in love to him, and after this the whole administration of the affairs of that country went through my hands.[22]

Christian August actually did take steps against the ring leaders of the attack on van Helmont. He had the Director of the Chancellery, Friedrich von Erlbeck, arrested, the Superintendent and court preacher, Theodosius Wider, suspended, and three leading citizens thrown into jail in chains. Only after entreaties made by his mother and the French envoy in Nuremberg did

[21] Wappmann says that van Helmont was "saved" by Johann Michael Dilheer, Christian August's mother's confessor (*Durchbruch*, p. 34).

[22] *Memoirs*, fols. Dr(-Fr).

Christian August relent and remand Erlbeck and the citizens to house arrest.[23]

Wappmann thinks that Christian August's meeting with van Helmont was instrumental in convincing him to be more even-handed in his approach to the Catholics. This seems to have been the case, for on the evening of June 6 (Corpus Christi) Christian August invited several Franciscans to the palace for discussions. In their presence he praised the Church Fathers and the mystics, Thomas à Kempis, and Johann Tauler. Twelve days later he told Gundermann that he hoped to resolve the problems with his uncle, Wolfgang Wilhelm, and he admitted that he had acted badly. On June 16 he went a step further and asked Gundermann to arrange a further meeting with the Franciscans. This took place on June 22 near Rosenburg. Christian August descended from his carriage and ordered the stable master to stand back with the words, "Saul inter Prophetas" (1 Samuel 10:12; 19:24). After a short walk alone with the two priests, he sat down on a woodpile and asked about the difference between Catholic and Lutheran beliefs. The conversation lasted for two hours and covered such important issues as the head of the Church, the Eucharist in both kinds (bread and wine), purgatory, the miracle of the Mass, and the invocation of saints. Christian August seemed convinced by what the priests said, but at the very end of the discussion, he brought up the Church's claim to worldly power. Were it not for this, he claimed that he and many others would convert. That evening Christian August invited the Catholic Chancellor from Neuburg, Baron Franz von Gise, and Colonel Wolfgang Jakob Ungelter to dinner, during which he complained about Lutherans.

Christian August's receptiveness to Catholicism continued. In August he met van Helmont at the Franciscan monastery in Amberg. The monks apparently did not know what to make of van Helmont's conversation, but the following day Christian August told Gundermann he had not felt so well in two years. Van Helmont returned with the Prince to Sulzbach only to meet the fury of the townspeople once again. They tried to drag him from the coach and kill him, but Christian August threatened to execute anyone who harmed his friend. By the end of August Christian August seemed to have entirely regained his sanity.[24]

Van Helmont's role in resolving Christian August's spiritual crisis was pivotal, but the resolution that Christian August came to was bitterly resented by the Lutherans in Sulzbach. For it led to the policy set out in the "Simultaneum," an accord reached between Christian August and his Catholic cousin Philipp Wilhelm in 1652, the year before Philipp Wilhelm became Count Palatine of Neuburg at the death of his father. The cousins agreed that all Church property and both Church and governmental positions in the territory of Sulzbach should be shared equally between Catholics and Lutherans. This was a bitter blow to the Lutherans, who saw it as an immoral capitulation to the hated Papacy. Initially the agreement was obviously

[23] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 66, n. 76.
[24] ibid., pp. 73-4.

advantageous for Catholics, but after Christian August's own conversion to Catholicism in 1655, they too turned against the Simultaneum and did everything in their power to have it repealed and have Lutheranism suppressed. Christian August's tolerance far exceeded that of his subjects. For all the success his policy had in keeping the peace between Protestants and Catholics, neither group had anything positive to say about the concept of toleration. The idea that there could be more than one truth made no sense to people who believed salvation depended upon their adherence to a particular creed.[25]

Christian August's spiritual crisis and his eventual conversion to Catholicism are extremely interesting both from a personal point of view and in terms of the larger religious conflicts of the seventeenth century. While his spiritual crisis appeared to come on with dramatic suddenness', in actuality the ground had been prepared earlier, during the two trips he took to Sweden in 1644 and 1648-9. Christian August had been struck by the more tolerant policy of Swedish Lutherans, a policy that had been pursued by Gustav Adolphus before his death and later by his daughter, Queen Christina. Gustav Adolphus had been influenced by the ecumenically-minded John Dury, who spent considerable time in Sweden working for a reconciliation between Scottish Presbyterians and Swedish Lutherans.[26] Dury convinced two of Gustav Adolphus' teachers, Johan Skytte and Johan Malthiae, as well as Gustav Adolphus himself, to support his plan for a simplified Church organization. Like Georg Calixt (1586-1656), the ecumenical professor at the Lutheran University of Helmstadt, Dury advocated a return to the simple and basic doctrines characteristic of apostolic Christianity. He believed that all Christians could accept these basic principles; whatever doctrines arose later could be accepted or rejected as individuals saw fit since they were "adiaphora," or unnecessary for salvation.

During his second trip to Sweden Christian August read a book that left a powerful impression on him. He gives its title as "De officio praedicationis male usurpando." Although this work has not been identified, Wappmann thinks it probably belonged in the mystical/spiritualist tradition.[27] It contributed to Christian August's questioning of the Lutheran belief in predestination and eternal damnation, a subject that he would discuss at length with van Helmont. By the time Christian August returned to Sulzbach in 1649, he was beginning to show signs of his growing disillusionment with Lutheranism and the spiritual crisis to come. He asked his Lutheran court preacher Theodosius Wider to include Calvinists in the Eucharist celebration. Wider refused, at which point Christian August asked him and another Lutheran minister "to help him out of his bad dream" ("[ihm] aus den Traum zu helfen"), by explaining communion. Their explanation was

[25] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 77ff.
[26] Akerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and her Circle*, pp. 130ff.
[27] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 63ff.

manifestly insufficient, for on Christian August's last attempt to participate in the Lutheran communion service, he fell into a faint immediately after he had received the sacrament. For a considerable time, he lay as if dead.[28]

Christian August's religious odyssey did not end with the resolution of his spiritual crisis in the fall of 1651; it continued through his conversion to Catholicism in 1655. Queen Christina's conversion, which happened shortly before, apparently had a great influence on Christian August.[29] They were not the only Protestant rulers to convert at this time, but members of a select group that included Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels (1623-1693), Johann Friedrich von Braunschweig-Luneburg, and Christian Louis von Heclenburg-Schwerin.[30] These men, together with Christian August, had been greatly influenced by Johann Philipp von Schönborn (1605-1673), Bishop of Würzburg and Archbishop and Elector of Mainz. Dubbed the "German Solomon" and the "Prince of Peace," von Schönborn was committed to a level of tolerance that was astonishing for the time. For example, he allowed the Lutherans to remain undisturbed in his own territories of Erfurt and Kitzingen. He even agreed to stand as godfather for Lutheran children, which meant he routinely took part in Protestant religious services, an unheard of practice for a Catholic. His plans for the reunion of Catholics and Protestants, of which the Pope disapproved, were supported by a number of other ecumenically-minded Lutherans and Catholics, including Leibniz.[31]

Christian August was a good friend of both Ernst von Hessen Rheinfels and Johann Philipp von Schönborn. He probably met the latter in the fall of 1651 while on a trip to Rheinfels to visit Ernst, who was himself unusually tolerant.[32] Christian August went many times to the court at Mainz to discuss theological matters, and the moderation and balance of Johann Philipp's religious views seem to have convinced him that Catholicism offered a greater chance than Protestantism for the kind of universal toleration to which he had become committed.[33] Susannah Akerman suggests that Queen Christina come to the same conclusion.[34] But whatever motives Christian August may have had—and historians are divided on this issue— his

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[28] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 62ff.

[29] ibid., p. 118.

[30] Other converts included Johannes Scheffler (Angelus Silesius), Johann Christian von Boineburg, and Johann Abraham Poemer, who later entered the service of Christian August.

[31] A further indication of Johann Philipp's unusual tolerance is revealed by the profound effect his meeting with Friedrich Spee, the ardent critic of witch burnings, had on him. When he became Bishop of Würzburg in 1642, he was one of the first imperial princes to stop all witch trials in his jurisdiction. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that Spee's book should have been printed at Sulzbach. Jürgensmeier, "Johann Philipp von Schönborn."

[32] Raab, "Das 'discret Catholische' des Langraften Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels"; Fincke, "Toleranz und 'Discrete' Frömmigkeit nach 1650: Pfalzgraf Christian August von Sulzbach und Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels."

[33] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 103ff.

[34] Akerman, *Queen Christina and her Circle*.

conversion was greeted with horror by his immediate Lutheran family. His mother wrote a letter forbidding him to visit her ever again.[35]

Van Helmont's role in Christian August's conversion is not altogether clear.[36] Although Christian August gives van Helmont credit for starting him on the path to conversion, Catholics were deeply suspicious of van Helmont's influence on the Prince. Philipp Wilhelm was so worried about van Helmont's presence at the Sulzbach court that he began a campaign to arrange for his arrest and imprisonment by the Inquisition. But long before the situation reached this crisis point, a very different account of the events that occurred in Sulzbach during the summer of 1651 began to circulate. In a letter written by John Finch, an educated English gentleman on a tour of the continent, to his sister Anne, Viscountess Conway, Finch offers an entirely different explanation for what had happened to van Helmont at the hands of the townspeople in Sulzbach. Little did Finch realize at the time he wrote what a profound influence van Helmont would later have on his sister.

Anne Finch (later Viscountess Conway) had begun to suffer from headaches at the age of seventeen. In the early years of her illness, her family had done everything in their power to discover a cure. They consulted the best English physicians, including Sir Theodore Mayerene, Thomas Willis, and William Harvey, and they agreed to try every possible treatment, even the extreme course of dosing with mercury.[37] She had even ventured across the channel to France to be trepanned, but the operation was not performed. Nothing helped. By 1653 her family despaired of ever finding a cure in England and turned again to the continent for doctors and medical advice. Seizing on the fact that his brother-in-law, John Finch, was already on the continent, Anne Conway's husband, Edward, wrote to him asking his opinion about van Helmont. Whether it was on the basis of his own reputation or his father's, the name van Helmont was well-enough known to excite the hopes of an Englishman disappointed with the medicine of his own country.

John Finch's reply was not encouraging. From one source he says that he has only heard that van Helmont can cure fevers and nothing else;[38] from another that van Helmont "is a very ignorant Person," who has never done anything extraordinary.[39] Finch continues by saying that from all the people he has talked to there is "nothing. . . worth mentioning," except a story

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[35] The horrified reactions of Christian August's mother are printed in Gack, *Geschichte des Herzogtums Sulzbach*. A staunch Lutheran, she accused Christian August of caring more for earthly political power than spiritual good (p. 308). Salecker argues that Christian August's conversion was made for genuine religious reasons (p. 47). For a thorough discussion of the mixed motives behind Christian August's conversion, see Wappmann, *Durchbruch*.

[36] Philip Jakob Spener blamed van Helmont for Christian August's conversion in the first edition of his *Sylloge Genealogico-Historia* (1668): "Tandem Helmonti consuetudine corruptus, 1656 a religione Evangelica defecit. . . ."

[37] See ch. 8 on Conway's illness and the various cures prescribed.

[38] Nicolson, ed. *Conway Letters* (hereafter *CL*), p. 85.

[39] ibid., p. 87.

which concerned van Helmont and a certain "Margrave."[40] He then proceeds to give the following account of van Helmont's traumatic experience in Sulzbach:

> . . . at Augusta, invited to dinner by a Margrave, [he and the Mar]grave both dranke themselves sicke, and that he then gave Physick to the Margrave which had like to have cost him his life, whereupon the friends of the Margrave had killed him but that the Margraves [confessour?] carry'd him out of the Citty upon his Horse, young Helmont riding behind him for his security.[41]

Finch's letter dashed any hope Anne Conway had in van Helmont at that time. He attributed van Helmont's reputation to his famous name and human credulity:

> If you would have me speake plainly to you, Helmont shall alwayes be more prized where he is not then where he is: For he having a legacy of fame left him by his Fathers learning who pretended to feints, People do naturally conclude that the sonne must needs enjoy what the Father delivers in mists to others, and till experience makes good the Contrary, Fame encreases to such a height that twill be hard for experience to levell that fame which was raysed without meritt.[42]

From all that he has heard, Finch concludes that van Helmont "appears to be a man of much experience, much Witt, but little Judgement, nay sometimes he appeares to me onely not mad." And with this opinion firmly in mind, he concludes it would be foolish for his sister to seek him out: "to advize you to a journey in order to take Physick from him were to dissemble my thoughts to you from whom I have never conceal'd my most retired opinion."[43]

Finch's account reflects the opinions of van Helmont's detractors, and, as we shall see, there were many of these—orthodox Galenists, who despised Paracelsian and Helmontian medicine, religious conservatives of all stamps, even religious radicals who did not accept van Helmont's kabbalistic theories, and, finally, all those Christians who feared and hated anything to do with Judaism and shied away from van Helmont as a "Judaizer." Yet for all his enemies, van Helmont had a devoted coterie of friends.[44] His undoubted charm and genuine concern for those in difficulty must have accounted for this to a degree, while his father's reputation and the well-known interest of both father and son in alchemy enhanced his stature. The economic ruin afflicting many parts of Germany after the Thirty Years' War stimulated an interest in alchemy among the impoverished German princes, who hoped to regain their lost fortunes through this art.[45]

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[40] *CL*, p. 86.
[41] ibid., pp. 86-87.
[42] ibid., p. 87.
[43] ibid.
[44] Even Finch's report about van Helmont was not all negative. He mentions several people impressed by van Helmont's ability to cure fevers (Nicolson, ed., *CL*, p. 85).
[45] Kopp, *Die Alchemie in alterer und neuerer Zeit*, I: 230ff.

At the time Finch wrote to his sister, he mentions that van Helmont was currently staying at "Sarisburgh,"[46] near Trent, with the "Elector of Luneburgh," and that two years before he had been staying with the "Duke of Brunswick" at Venice.[47] It is difficult to know to whom Finch is referring. There were no German Princes with either the title Duke of Brunswick or Elector of Luneburgh.[48] In all probability Finch was describing one of the three brothers of the Brunswick-Luneburg family. The eldest, John Frederick, often went to Venice, and perhaps van Helmont was staying with him. He may equally well have been with either Georg Wilhelm or Ernst August, who were also frequent visitors to Venice. Whomever he was with, Finch's letter does point out that van Helmont had become acquainted with the family as early as 1651. He was later to know Ernst August particularly well after Ernst August's marriage in 1658 to Sophie, the Palatine Princess. Van Helmont often visited them, first at Osnabruck, where Ernst August had been made Bishop, and later at Hanover, when Ernst August became Elector. It was in the course of these visits that van Helmont and Leibniz became good friends.[49]

In 1656 van Helmont returned to Heidelberg and became involved in a bitter quarrel between Karl Ludwig and his younger brother Rupert. The quarrel was primarily over Rupert's right (or lack of right) to inherit property, but it was complicated by the past relationship between the two brothers and by Karl Ludwig's marital problems. There had always been a good deal of rivalry between Karl Ludwig and Rupert. Karl Ludwig lacked the dash and appealing manners of his younger brother; he was both more thoughtful and more calculating. The natural polarity of their temperaments became fixed in their reactions to the revolution in England. While Rupert became a devoted and rash supporter of his uncle, Charles I, Karl Ludwig prejudged the outcome and, looking to his own interests, sided with Parliament, much to the disgust of his mother and brother.

The political breach between Karl Ludwig and Rupert was exacerbated by Rupert's return to Heidelberg in 1654. Having resigned all his positions under the Royalists to command a pirate expedition which failed, Rupert arrived at his brother's court penniless and without position. He felt that he was entitled to hold some territory and became exceedingly angry when Karl Ludwig offered him what he considered an insufficient sum of money and an insalubrious abode instead.[50] He immediately left for Vienna where he intended to claim from the Emperor the forty thousand rix-dollars due to him under the Peace of Westphalia.[51]

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[46] " Sarisburgh" was possibly Saarburg in Rhenish Prussia. See Nicolson, ed., *CL*, p. 85, n. 7.

[47] ibid., pp. 84-85.

[48] Brunswick-Luneburg was only made an Electorate in 1692.

[49] Leibniz first met van Helmont in Mainz in 1671. For a chronology of his further meetings with van Helmont, see my *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, xiii-xvii.

[50] Van Helmont acted as Rupert's envoy in his dealing with his brother, Karl Ludwig. See Hauck, *Die Briefe der Kinder des Winterkönigs* (letter dated 9/19 October, 1657), pp. 126-8.

[51] *The Articles of the Treaty of Peace, signed and sealed at Munster, in Westphalia, the 24th of October, 1648...*, 1697 (hereafter *Articles of the Treaty signed at Munster)*, p. 10, article xxi.

The quarrel became further complicated by the amorous indiscretions of the two brothers. In 1657 Rupert made the indelicate mistake of sending a love letter to Luise von Degenfelt, an attractive woman at the Heidelberg court, to whom Karl Ludwig had already become very much attached. Thinking Rupert's letter was for Karl Ludwig's wife, Charlotte (who apparently did have a penchant for Rupert), Luise von Degenfelt passed it on to her. In the embarrassing situation that followed, it became clear to the Electress both that Rupert's letter was not intended for her and that her husband was carrying on an affair with Luise. Humiliated and deceived, the Electress's anger against Luise was so great that it took the physical intervention of Karl Ludwig to stop his wife from assaulting her rival.[52]

Van Helmont stepped into the quarrel at this stage. In October he carried a passionately written and incoherent memorandum from Rupert to Karl Ludwig, in which Rupert restated his monetary and territorial demands.[53] Karl Ludwig once again refused to agree or even to discuss the matter with his brother. When Rupert arrived before the gates of the castle in Heidelberg he found his brother had ordered them locked against him. He vowed never to set foot in the Palatinate again, which, indeed, he never did. The quarrel was finally settled in 1670.[54]

During the same year, 1658, van Helmont also began to act for Karl Ludwig's and Rupert's sister, Elizabeth. Elizabeth had the opportunity to become the Abbess of Herford, a position she very much wanted. She was unable to accept the offer immediately, however, because she was expected to arrive at the Abbey with a handsome dowry. Like all members of her family, Elizabeth's financial situation was precarious. Under the Peace of Westphalia, each of Karl Ludwig's sisters were entitled to receive 10,000 Imperial Thalers from the Emperor as dowries.[55] The sum had not yet been paid and Elizabeth entrusted van Helmont to press her claim before the Emperor. Her sister, Sophie, describes van Helmont's involvement in Elizabeth's affairs in a letter to Karl Ludwig in June, 1658:

> my sister Elizabeth is also going to be canonized and tells me that she has been offered the Abbey of Herford and that if she accepts, she wishes to lead a very retired life there, and she prays that God will give her by the hand of Helmont the money from the Emperor, which she would very much like to have to furnish the house.[56]

See Ward, *The Electress Sophia and the Hanoverian Succession* (hereafter *Electress Sophia)*, pp. 94ff.

[52] For a vivid account of the scene between Karl Ludwig and his wife see Kocher, hrsg., *Memoiren der Herzogin Sophie. . . Kurfurstin von Hannover*, pp. 57-58.

[53] Bromley, *A Collection of Originall Royal Letters*, p. 205.

[54] Godfrey, *Heidelberg*, p. 320; Ward, *Electress Sophia*, pp. 94-96.

[55] *Articles of the Treaty signed at Munster*, p. 11, article xxiv.

[56] Bodemann, *Briefwechsel der Herzogin Sophie von Hannover mit ihren Bruder, dem Kurfursten Karl Ludwig*, pp. 4-5: ". . . ma soeur Elisabeth se va faire canoniser aussi et me mende, qu'on luy offre l'abei d'Herforde et que, si elle en accepte, qu'elle y veut mener une vie fort retirée et prier, que Dieu luy veuille donner par la main d'Helmond l'argent de l'Empereur qu'elle voudroit bien avoir pour meubler la maison."

Van Helmont was apparently successful, although only after many years, for in 1667 Elizabeth did become the Abbess of Herford.

In the fourteen years since his father's death, van Helmont had been constantly engaged in the service of German Princes and Princesses. His help must have been considerable, for on August 3, 1658, at the age of forty-four, he received a Patent of Nobility from Emperor Leopold in recognition of his good works. The request for the Patent had been made by the Elector of Mainz, the same Johann Philipp von Schönborn who played a decisive part in Christian August's conversion to Catholicism. In a letter to the Emperor von Schönborn praised van Helmont's role as a mediator. Although he asked that van Helmont be given the title of Count, the Emperor conferred the lesser title of Baron, probably because van Helmont did not possess the necessary amount of land within the Empire to qualify for the more exalted rank. The Emperor made it clear, however, that this was merely a legalistic difference, and that van Helmont and the members of his family were to enjoy the privileges due to a Count. The Patent of Nobility gives a good, indeed a glowing, picture of van Helmont's work as an effective peace-maker:

> considering that the noble, great, loyal, and esteemed Francis Mercury van Helmont. . . was called about ten years ago to the court of our divine Emperor Ferdinand III. . . and that he had been detained there as later among different Electors and Princes of the Empire, during which space of time, he, with the assistance of divine benignity, discharged loyal and fruitful work for the state and for the public safety towards conciliating and reconciling some elevated and illustrious ducal and princely families and towards quieting a great many ardent and long established difficulties by procuring, conserving, stabilizing and propagating peace, friendship and good and sincere trust in many ways, to such a point that he himself and all his goods—as if he was devoted to the public good—never evaded any labor, difficulty, journey, embassy, commission, or vexation, nor suffered himself to be deterred from such beneficial intentions and plans on the grounds of their by no means trifling costs or threat to his work, as well as to himself. . . , we favor and applaud, with not undeserving mercy, these most distinguished actions and his generous spirit. [57]

There is great irony in the fact that van Helmont received his patent of nobility because of the recommendation given by von Schönborn, the very

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[57] Van Helmont appended the text of his Patent of Nobility to his *Paradoxal Discourses,* pp. 206-215. The following quotation comes from pp. 207-208: "Considerantes itaq; Generosum & Magnificum Nostrum & Sacri Imperii fidelem dilectum Franciscum Mercurium ab Helmont. . . ante decinnium fere, ad Divi quondam Emperatoris Ferdinandi Tertii. . . tam ibi, quam postmodo aped diversos Electores atq; Princpes Imperii detentum atque occupatum fujisse, intra quod temoris spatium, ipsum aspirante Divina benignitate, statui salutique publicae in corciliandis non nullis sublimibus, & illustrissimus Ducum Principumque Familiis compenendis sopiendisque plurimis arduis difficilibus & inveterartis controversiis procuranda, conservanda, stabilianda; progagandaque Pace amicitia bonaque & sincera confidentia alisque plurimis modis fidelem, & frutuosam operam praestitisse, adeoque se ipsum & omnia sua, publicis utilitatibus quasi devovisse, neque ullam laborem vel difficultatem, itinerum item, legationum, commissionumque molestiam subterfugisse, neque sumptibus sanc non exiguis, hic operi continue, atque de suo impendendis, se a tam salutari proposito atque instituto deterreri passum esse. Quibus suis praeclaris ac Generoso animo dignis actionibus . . . non immerito clementisseme favemus & applaudimus."

person who was later to play a decisive part in van Helmont's arrest and imprisonment by the Inquisition.

Van Helmont had returned to Sulzbach for a brief period in the fall of 1657 to treat Christian August's infant son, who eventually died, as well as his wife for what Wappmann surmises was a still-birth.[58] He met Christian August again the following year at Frankfurt, where Christian August spent the months of April to August, participating in the celebrations attending the coronation of Emperor Leopold. It was during these celebrations that van Helmont received his patent of nobility.

The years 1658-59 marked another turning point in Christian August's religious policy. New faces began to appear in Sulzbach, and they did nothing to reassure Philipp Wilhelm about his cousin's commitment to Catholicism. Once again van Helmont was at the center of these changes, for it was largely through him that the new arrivals were attracted to Sulzbach. One of the first newcomers to arrive was Tobias Ludwig Kohlhans (1624-1705).[59] Kohlhans was installed as Christian August's physician and private secretary on May 5, 1658. He had studied under the Jewish physician Jakob Israel (1621-1674) at the University of Heidelberg, where he had received a degree in 1655. It was there that he met van Helmont at the time van Helmont was helping to sort out Karl Ludwig's marital problems. Because of Kohlhans diplomatic skills and his family ties with important officials in Saxony and Thuringia, he became Christian August's most important and trusted political adviser for the next ten years.[60] Kohlhans became one of van Helmont's closest friends and his life paralleled van Helmont's in many ways. They both became Quakers, and they worked together on various projects during the 1680s and 90s when both were living in Rotterdam.

While in Frankfurt at Leopold's coronation, van Helmont introduced Christian August to Christoph LeBlon, who became one of Christian August's bankers.[61] He was precisely the kind of person who made the orthodox on both sides of the religious divide uneasy, for he was a follower of the mystic and spiritualist Jakob Boehme and the first to translate Boehme into French. His brother, Michael LeBlon was the Swedish agent in Amsterdam and a close friend of Abraham von Frankenberg,[62] another suspicious person from an orthodox perspective. It was through von Frankenberg that Michael obtained the Boehme manuscript his brother translated. Kohlhans and LeBlon were the first two of a stream of new arrivals in Sulzbach.

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[58] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 167.

[59] Jöcher mistakenly refers to him as Caspar, which has led some historians (notably Hull) to think there were two Kohlhans brothers.

[60] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 164ff.

[61] ibid., p. 167, n. 34.

[62] ibid.

Shortly after van Helmont received his Patent of nobility he left Germany and returned to Holland to settle the financial affairs of his family.[63] He had inherited some money from his great Grandmother, Margaret van Merode, and if he followed his previous pattern, he probably gave it to some member of his immediate family. While at Brussels he discovered one of his father's treatises which gave the first methodical survey of Jan Baptista's ideas. He had it published in Amsterdam under the title *Dageraed oft Nieuwe Opkomst der Geneeskonst* in 1659.

Van Helmont's stay in Holland was short. The following year he was back among his friends in Heidelberg and party to an event which became significant in the context of his later life. In 1659 a Quaker by the name of William Ames arrived at the Elector's Court. The Quakers had great hopes of making converts in the Palatinate. Karl Ludwig had a reputation for tolerance throughout his life,[64] and he was in desperate need of settlers for his territories. The population of the Palatinate had been decimated by the Thirty Years' War. If one estimate is to be believed—although it seems impossible—only one fiftieth of the inhabitants was left by the time peace was made.[65] Realizing that Karl Ludwig was both tolerant and eager for settlers, the Quakers hoped they could persuade him to accept Quaker immigrants. Van Helmont was staying at Heidelberg when the Quakers came. His meeting with Ames marked his first recorded encounter with a member of the sect he was to join eighteen years later.

The people with van Helmont when he met Ames remarked on the great interest van Helmont had shown in Ames's refusal to remove his hat.[66] Van Helmont himself mentions this aspect of Quaker behavior at length in his *Memoirs*. It was a breach of etiquette that started him thinking about the futility, even stupidity, of courtly behavior in general:

> . . . as for putting off the hat and such like, it is plain that they are nothing but occasion and matter of pride, as all Courtiers have confessed to me who understand the bottom of these things better than any man. For Courtiers in their complementing with one another and desiring one another to be covered first are just like two bulls who are so long pushing at one another with their horns, so long till one of them run away, and then that which run away must never after contend with the other again or, in case he does, will be gored by him and have his belly ript open. So he of those Courtiers who first put on his hat will expect to do so continually and if the other should put on his hat before him he would mortally hate him and seek to destroy him. And I know that the

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[63] In the Patent of Nobility it is mentioned that van Helmont is about to depart for Holland for financial reasons, *Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 208.

[64] Shortly before his death Karl Ludwig dedicated a Church he had built at Manheim to *Sancta Corcordia* and hoped that Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists would worship in it together. See Bodermann, *Briefwechsel der Herzogin Sophie mit Karl Ludwig*, p. 297; Ward, *Electress Sophia*, p. 91. It is interesting, however, that for all his apparent tolerance, Karl Ludwig was not in favor of the Christian August's religious policy and denounced the "Simultaneums" (Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 97).

[65] Ward, *Electress Sophia*, p. 88.

[66] Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers*, p. 196.

> customes of the Court, where every man knows the exact proportion of Honour and respect he is to give to others and he who is not skild in this scale of honour may be easily known that he is no Courtier. Besides there is this evill more in it, that they who submit and bow themselves to a proud spirit become thereby subject and slave to it.[67]

It may not be too imaginative to weave together an intriguing set of independent incidents and suggest that van Helmont had been in England and in close contact with the Quakers long before he officially affiliated himself to the sect. In 1660 George Fox, the leader and founder of the Quakers, made a tantalizing reference to a certain ambassador from Germany who attended a Quaker meeting at Pell Mell:

> And att Pell Mell aforesaid there came severall great persons to ye meetings there yt was reacht & there cam an embassador of some parte of Germany & hee was convinct & he woulde goe amongst friends to learne to bee a linnen weaver yt hee might teach ye art of it in his owne Country, when hee came home; & I sent him into ye country amongst friendes: where he stayed about a month: & learnt ye trade & after some time hee past away; receiving the truth & owneinge ye Lord Jesus Christ his teacher.[68]

This could very well have been van Helmont. He was a close adviser of both Karl Ludwig and Christian August and could, therefore, justly be described as a German ambassador. Towards the end of his life Leibniz described him as a skilled weaver who made his own clothes.[69] From a further source, it appears that he designed and constructed his own spinning wheels. In 1714 when the books and curiosities of van Helmont's good friend Benjamin Furly (1636-1714) were sold at public auction, two of van Helmont's spinning wheels and a reel were listed for sale in the catalogue:

> 15. A spinning wheel made of palm wood and brass, —you can spin with both hands and the whole can be screwed together, and made by Mr. F.M. van Helmont.
> 16. One made like it, and invented and made by Mr. F.M. van Helmont.
> 17. A beautiful winder, which can be screwed together, also invented and made by Mr. Van Helmont.[70]

They were sold for sold for *f* 3.50, 2.00 and 2.25 respectively.[71]

In the same year, 1660, another Quaker, George Fox's step-daughter, Margaret Fell, makes a reference to a medically minded Dutchman in a letter she wrote to her mother. It is conceivable that this, too, is a reference to van Helmont, who was much sought after for medical advice.[72] There is another piece of evidence that suggests van Helmont made a trip to England around this time. A letter from van Helmont to Jean d'Aubry, Abbé of Notre Dame de l'Assomption, Councilor and Physician-in-ordinary to the French King,

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[67] *Memoirs*, fols. Hr.(-Iv.).
[68] *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. N. Penny, II: 4.
[69] Klopp, *Correspondence de Leibniz avec l'Electrice Sophie de Brunswick-Lunebourg*, II: 8.
[70] List of curiosities in *Bibliotheca Furliana*, pp. 348-349:
[71] Prices written in margin.
[72] Margaret Fell to her mother, Margaret Fell Fox, 13 March 1660, London, Friends' House, Leek MSS.

was published by d'Aubry in his *Le Triomphe de l'Archée et la Merveille du Monde, ou La Medecine Universelle, et Veritable Pour toutes sortes de Maladies les plus desesperés.*[73] The title of this work indicates d'Aubry's medical allegiance to Paracelsus and van Helmont. D'Aubry wrote a number of books on medicine, which were published over a thirty year period. In *Le Triomphe de l'Archée* he laments the fact that so many physicians condemn Paracelsus without understanding him: "I have seen at Montpellier (the town of my birth) many doctors so fearful that they condemn Paracelsus, and then when I ask them in what consists the theory of Paracelsus, they frankly admit that they understand nothing."[74] To change the situation d'Aubry writes at length about Paracelsus and particularly about the *archeus*, "which gives life, birth and the characteristic qualities to all created things."[75] In his letter, van Helmont mentions the "belles cures" that d'Aubry was apparently responsible for in Holland, and he hopes that he and d'Aubry will correspond. But he adds that this may be difficult at the moment because of his imminent departure for England.[76]

Two curious and undated passages in van Helmont's *Memoirs* fit well with the idea that he traveled to England around this time. In the first, he dramatically describes a near shipwreck. This could have happened off the coast of England:

> Being once in a very great storm of 6 dayes and nights continuance, wherein our ship took in so much water that all our good [sic] were swimming in her and all our provisions lost and we were about to throw over board our most comfortable goods, but that I hindered it, we having wrought incessantly and received no sustenence at all during all that time, and the ship frequently overwhelmed with waves, and all resolved to run her against a rock to save ourselves but the wind was contrary, and drove us from land, then it was that I exhorted my companions continually to resign and yield up their lives and I found myselfe most ready to give up my life and to dye, tho at the same time I had also a casting about, whether any thing further might be done for the saving of ourselves. . . and upon the beginning of the 7th day we had a calm.[77]

From a further passage we learn that van Helmont's first few days on land were no improvement. Delivered from the sea, he found himself in the midst of a great fire, which, with characteristic gusto, he says he put out single-handed:

> I by myself alone quenched a fire which was by chance kindled in a barn where there were about 40 horses in the night time, which after I had done, no one gave me a good word for it. . . This success of quenching of the fire happened

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[73] No date or place of publication is given, but van Helmont's letter is dated March 20, 1657. Debus thinks the book appeared c. 1660 (*The French Paracelsians*, p. 76).

[74] *Le Triomphe de l'Archée*, p. 14.

[75] ibid., p. 1.

[76] "Letter du Sieur Helmont, escritte au Sieur Abbé d'Aubry, à Buxelles ce 20. Mars 1657" (*Le Triomphe de l'Archée*, Eiij).

[77] *Memoirs*, fol. Kr.

> to me, as I was newly escaped from a shipwreck where I was 6 days without eating and yet was working all the while to save that ship.[78]

At a further point in his *Memoirs*. van Helmont describes how he advised a German Prince to set up weaving looms in order to employ the beggars in his territory. Perhaps van Helmont was passing on his newly acquired talent to his friend Christian August shortly after his return from England to Germany in 1661:

> Being with a certain prince in Germany who asked me whether I could no find some employment for the beggars to set them a work, I seeing that all provisions of victualls all were very cheap there, I thought it would be good to sow flax and make spinning houses and places of weaving, and other worke belonging to the making of linnen in order therunto.[79]

Van Helmont was with Christian August during that year. In September Sophie wrote to her brother Karl Ludwig about van Helmont, saying "Helmond is lost with the Duke of Sulzbach; no one knows what has become of them."[80] The two men were not lost, however. Although Christian August had left Sulzbach on September 10, 1660 without revealing to anyone his destination, he was actually on his way to Holland to meet van Helmont in order to look for a Lutheran replacement for John Kaspar Bentz, the Sulzbach town preacher, who had recently died.[81] Christian August did not want his intention of visiting Lutherans as well as other sectarians, who lived freely in Holland, to be publicly known. In the delicate religious situation following the upheavals of the Thirty Years' War, it was not safe for a Prince or nobleman to show open interest in deviant or heretical beliefs. Christian August was in a particularly vulnerable position because of his recent conversion to Catholicism. There was much to suggest to Catholics that his faith was more a matter of politics than personal conviction, for nine days after his conversion (on January 6, 1656) Christian August obtained full sovereignty over his lands from Philip Wilhelm.

By granting Catholics the right to worship in 1652 and by becoming a Catholic himself, Christian August changed the religious character of Sulzbach. Before 1652 there had been very few Catholics in the Sulzbach territories, and only thirty Catholic families in Sulzbach itself. Soon after Christian August's conversion, however, due to the hard work of the Jesuits, the number of Catholics had jumped to 1500.[82] Neither the Catholics nor the Jesuits wished to lose their hard won gains. They were worried that Christian August's association with van Helmont would undermine his faith. Their apprehension grew as they viewed the increasing number of so-called "enthusiasts" who came to the Sulzbach court at van Helmont's instigation.

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[78] *Memoirs*, fol. Gr.

[79] ibid., fol. Br.

[80] Bodemann, *Briefwechsel der Herzogin Sophie mit Karl Ludwig*, p. 45: "Helmond s'est perdu avec le Duc de Sulzbach; personne ne scait ce qui en est devenu."

[81] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 168ff.

[82] Duhr, *Geschichte der Jesuiten in den Landern deutscher Zunge*, III: 136.

As one obviously prejudiced Protestant historian later wrote of these men: "Their doctrines agreed with the heresies of those sects which are known by the name of Quakers, the followers of Weigel and Anabaptists."[83] But if one looks carefully at the people who came to Sulzbach as a result of Christian August's trip to Holland and largely on the advice of van Helmont, there was indeed reason for both Catholics and Lutherans to worry.

The recruits included three close friends, Justus Brawe (1615-1665), who assumed the position of Superintendent, Johann Jakob Fabricius (1618/20-1673), who came to Sulzbach in November 1660 as town preacher, and Clamerus Florinus (1618-1696), who took the position of minister for Rosenberg and Poppenricht. These men had been students together at Rostock University, a center of reformed Lutheranism known for the study of oriental languages, particularly Hebrew. One of the consequences of Christian August's spiritual crises was that it had made him more determined than ever to study the Bible in the original Greek and Hebrew. It was therefore no coincidence that these three new recruits to Sulzbach were all accomplished Hebraists, so proficient in fact that they spoke Hebrew in their own families and organized classes to teach the Bible on the basis of the Hebrew and Greek texts.[84] While in Sulzbach, Brawe printed a chart of Hebrew words and grammar, while Florinus produced a text book on Hebrew accents.[85]

The reputation of these three Rostock graduates preceded them. During the period they had lived in Holland before their arrival in Sulzbach, they were involved in setting up what were essentially forerunners of pietistic colleges, small congregations that provided a refuge for Lutherans in conflict with prevailing orthodoxy, while at the same time welcoming free spirits, millenarians, mystics, and spiritualists. These congregations were carefully watched by the Lutheran Consistory in Amsterdam.[86] As graduates of Rostock, Fabricius, Brawe, and Florinus had been deeply affected by the ecumenical teaching of Johann Arndt (1555-1621), who had a profound affect on the Rostock faculty and students. Arndt's *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum* (1606-1610) emphasized personal piety and the rebirth of the "new man" in the believer's soul. It was the most widely read book of devotional literature in the seventeenth century, but this did not endear it to orthodox Lutherans in Sulzbach or anywhere else.

It is difficult to know precisely what the religious views of Fabricius, Brawe, and Florinus were because their writings were not widely distributed and they were in some cases banned.[87] But their strong emphasis on ethics and morality suggests their affinity for Weigel and Arndt. Fabricius left the most evidence. He wrote a tract about the sermon on the mount in which he

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[83] Cited in Salecker, *von Rosenroth*, p. 43: ". . . ihre Lehren stimmten mit den Irrlehren jener Sekten uberein, die unter dem namen quaker, weigelianer und wiedertaufur bekannt seien."

[84] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 175, n. 79.

[85] ibid., p. 185.

[86] ibid., p. 191.

[87] ibid., p. 184.

stressed the theme of rebirth.[88] He also wrote several tracts deploring the irreligious lives of most professing Lutherans, which singled out the nobility for special criticism. This kind of pointed social criticism contributed to his reputation as a follower of Weigel. Fabricius was also extremely critical of the orthodox Lutheran teaching on justification, arguing that the emphasis on Jesus's role in salvation removed the responsibility of individuals and consequently confirmed them in their sinfulness. In his opinion, it was far better to read Scripture and other holy books, particularly those by Arndt, than to study and memorize the Lutheran catechism. The Lutherans in Sulzbach were correct in thinking that Fabricius's teacher was not Luther but Arndt.

The three friends appear to have embraced even more outrageous ideas. They credited the sacraments and Scripture with little efficacy in their own right. Although they agreed that God was manifest in Scripture, just as he was in nature, they believed that true faith came from repentance, not from the written or spoken word.[89] Confessional differences were consequently of little importance; what mattered was the "heart." They also emphasized the importance of learning Hebrew since it was the language of God, creation, and prophecy.

Before their arrival in Sulzbach, Fabricius, Florinus, and Brawe were in contact with others mystics and spiritualists who were also deeply suspect in orthodox eyes. They were friends of the philosopher and logician, Herman Jungius,[90] who had also studied at Rostock and shared a passion for Hebrew. In the 1640s Jungius set up a "Collegia biblica et catechetica," in which he tried to bring together natural philosophy and religion. This was an interest that the three recruits to Sulzbach also pursued. Fabricius was an accomplished mathematician; Brawe was interested in chemistry; and Florinus was committed to pedagogical reform and devoted to natural philosophy. Jungius planned to translate the mystical, spiritualist works of Ludwig Friedrich Gifftheil (1595-1661).[91] He was also an associate of Jon Amos Comenius (1592-1670), whose interest in languages, pedagogical reform, and ecumenism he shared. Fabricius planed to translate Comenius's *Janua linguarum* into Hebrew.[92] It appears that van Helmont was also interested in translating this book as well.[93] Another radical, spiritualist friend of the Rostock graduates was Friedrich Breckling (1629-1711), who became the leader of the non-conforming Lutherans in Holland.

With opinions and friends like these, it is understandable why Fabricius, Brawe, and Florinus met such hostility from orthodox Lutherans and

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[88] *Die Lehr von der Widerfgeburt/ vom alten und neuen Menschen/ und von Creutzigung des südlichen Fleisches.*

[89] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, pp. 185-7.

[90] ibid., p. 173.

[91] ibid., p. 176.

[92] ibid., p. 176.

[93] The intended publication of this translation was announced in J.D. Gruber's *Commercii Epistolici Leibnitiani. . .*, tomi prodromi, pars altera (1745), pp. 1094ff.

Catholics in Sulzbach. They were accused of being Rosicrucians, Quakers, and Anabaptists, in addition to being followers of Weigel. Philipp Wilhelm was especially distressed by the presence of these newcomers. He reproached Christian August for travelling to the Netherlands and spending so much money to attract such disreputable ministers when good and honest ones were readily available at home. He warned his cousin that Sulzbach could turn into another Münster or England, torn apart by civil war.[94] In Philipp Wilhelm's eyes things had definitely gotten out of hand, and the person responsible for this was none other than van Helmont. Others agreed. A letter written (perhaps) by Andreas Georg Paumgartner, one of Christian August's advisors, to the former Chancellor of Sulzbach, Johann Ernst von Rautenstein, indicates the degree of hostility against van Helmont:

> In Sulzbach the confusion does not diminish but daily grows greater. The dear Prince, according to the local gossip, is so hated on all sides that all his servants are quitting. . . Old, honest citizens in Sulzbach are prohibited from becoming mayor. . . . It is said that Helmont dares to show disrespect to Prince Philip [Christian August's brother]. This fool, who calls himself Herr Reichsbaron, was beaten to a pulp [Brügelsuppe], which he could have warmed up in his new kitchen or oven.[95] . . . But it gets even better. The Duke does not care a fig for anyone but Helmont, and anyone who is not with him is against his Highness.[96]

Philipp Wilhelm took matters into his own hands and began to work behind the scenes to rid Sulzbach of these newcomers. He had Fabricius, Brawe, and Florinus publicly denounced from the Cathedral at Regensburg with a call for their expulsion,[97] and he started building up a dossier of charges against van Helmont, which he brought to the attention of his Catholic friends and the Inquisition. The Inquisition documents dealing with van Helmont's case give a clear picture of how seriously Catholics viewed the situation in Sulzbach.

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[94] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 177.

[95] This may be a reference to the alchemical laboratory van Helmont had built at Sulzbach.

[96] Nürnberg, 25. 4. 1661. S. HStA München, Kasten blau 82/17, fols. 542ff. Quoted in Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 178, n. 94: "Zu Sultzbach nimbt die Confusion nicht ab, sondern leider täglich zu, daß dieser liebe Herr [Christian August] communis fabula der Benachbarten und allerseits so verhast würd, daß alle Diener von ihm weichen, maßen dann Seehaußen sich auch abgefordert und seine Dimission erhalten hatt. Allte ehrliche Bürger werden von dem Bürgermeisterambt daselbst augescholseen, und ein alhier entwichener Fallitt:/ welcher doch ein schönes Weib/: auf Recomendation deß Stallmeisters dazu befördert. Hellbundius [Helmont] unterstunde sich, Hertzog Philip [Christian August's brother] fast zu despectiren; es hätte aber der Herr Reichsbaron :/ also nennete sich der Narr /: balt Brügelsuppe davon bekommen/ die hätte er inn seiner newen Küche oder Offen wärmen können. . . . Aber es ist also beßer. Dem Pv [Pfalzgrafen] niemand gilt ettwas als Helmont, und wer nicht mitt ihm ist, der ist wider den Sereniss."

[97] A series of pamphlets and petitions exists in Wolfenbüttel in the Herzog August Bibliothek, denouncing Philipp Wilhelm's charges and testifying to the orthodoxy of the men he wished to have expelled. Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 181. See, for example, *Testimonia Catholica Generosi Domini Francisci Mercurii Baronis ab Hellmont, ejusdem nativitatem, fidem et vitam contestantia* (Ambergae, Typis Joannis Burger, 1662).

CHAPTER THREE

ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

After his return to Sulzbach from Holland in 1661, van Helmont parted from Christian August and traveled to Heidelberg. At the instigation of Phillip Wilhelm the Sulzbach Catholics were anxious to lure him away from the safety of this Protestant Electorate and deliver him into the hands of the Inquisition. Van Helmont claimed he had learned of their plan in a letter presumably sent to him by Christian August:

> And I knew beforehand that they would take me prisoner, for there was a Duke who sent me a letter by footman to advise me to stay at the court of the Elector Palatine for that if I departed I should be taken prisoner.[1]

With characteristic bravado, van Helmont took no notice of Christian August's warning, but decided on the prompting of a dream that it would be better to be taken prisoner if it came to that:

> I balanced the matter in my own thoughts whether I should expose myself to be taken prisoner, and not being able to come to resolution in my selfe, I was going to take my rest and therein had a dream which determined me, and it was of something that had formerly happened which was that I by myself alone quenched a fire. . . and this made me resolve to let myself be taken prisoner, for I thought I would quench that fire alone though in danger of my own selfe.[2]

Having made this decision, van Helmont left Heidelberg and made his way to Kützingen, where he dined with his former friend and admirer the Archbishop Johann Philipp von Schönborn. The very next day the Archbishop signed an order for his apprehension by the Inquisition.

Samuel Hartlib passed on news of this event in a letter to John Worthington dated January 14, 1662:

> I received lately another letter from Mr. Serrarius[3] in these words. . . we hear from Germany that Helmont is secured prisoner in the name of the Elector of Maintz, with whom he dined newly before, and parted friendly from him. They carried him to Newburg and there keep him close, so that no man may come

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[1] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Gr.

[2] ibid.

[3] Peter Serrarius was a chiliast in Amsterdam who believed in universal salvation. He was undoubtedly one of the people Francis Mercury and Christian August met on their trip to Holland. His interests were similar to van Helmont's and they had many friends in common. He wrote a book entitled *De Judaeorum* (Amsterdam, 1665), in which he discussed the conversion of the Jews and the end of the world. He also transcribed one of Adam Boreel's manuscripts and supplied Oldenburg with political news. He was an ardent millenarian and one of the few Christians to believe that Sabbatai Sevi was the Messiah. Leibniz mentions him in a letter to the Duchess of Hanover, 3 September, 1694 (Klopp, *Correspondence de Leibniz avec l'Electrice Sophie*, I: 300ff.) For more information about Serrarius, see the work of van der Wall in the bibliography.

> close to him. The Lord be with him, and preserve him from evil. Amen. From Frankfort they write to me that it is feared Helmont shall be carried away prisoner to the Pope in Rome. Let it be how it will, his case is dangerous. O the treachery of the world! God hide us under the shadow of the cross of Christ, where the malice of the world shall not find us.[4]

In a subsequent letter to Worthington, Hartlib passes on more information from Serrarius. Serrarius was skeptical of the alleged reasons given for van Helmont's arrest. In his view the Jesuits were more interested in Francis Mercury's alchemical knowledge than his religious beliefs:

> Mr. Serrarius writes again, Feb. 7: "From Helmont we have none other tidings but that he is still prisoner, and that very close, no man being admitted to him. They accuse him of seducing the Prince of Sulzback, and of having spoken ill of the Jesuits, and such like matters; whereas their aim seems to be no other than to force out of him some of his father's secrets. The Lord comfort and strengthen him with that glorious power wherewith Christ overcame the world."[5]

After Neuburg, van Helmont was taken to Milan, where he arrived in February, 1662. He protested his innocence to the Archbishop, staunchly maintaining that he was a good Catholic who had been maligned and badly misrepresented. But, come what may, he declared himself resigned to the will of God. Van Helmont's remarkable composure at such a perilous time surprised the Archbishop, who wrote with consternation to Cardinal Chigi that "it appeared strange to him [van Helmont] to be put in my jail. . . . He thought rather to live with my vicar-General."[6] From Milan, van Helmont was taken to Bologna, and from there to Rome, as Serrarius had feared. He describes this part of his trip in his *Memoirs*, implying through the increasing number of soldiers sent to guard him that he was a prisoner of considerable stature:

> As I was carried prisoner through all the townes of Italy, they having expected me burnt, before all which time I was in the inquisition in Milan, and they carried me though all of the cities my guard being never less than 3, 4, 5, or 6 score soldiers.[7]

Van Helmont's imprisonment was no light matter. Hartlib, Worthington, and Serrarius were genuinely concerned for his safety, even for his life. From van Helmont's own account, there was a real possibility that he might end up at the stake. His temperament and philosophy fortified him against such an alarming prospect. Applying to his own situation the alchemical principle that transmutation only occurs through the death and suffering of metals—in other words, through their immersion in the fire and furnace of the

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[4] *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, ed. Crossley, pp. 98-101.

[5] ibid., pp. 107-109.

[6] Litta to Chigi, March 1 1662, Archivio Segrreto Vaticano, Lettere Cardinali, vol. 105, fol. 24r-v. Cited in Vismara, "Tra Quaccheri, Millenaristi e Inquisitori: F.M. van Helmont (1614-1699), p. 37.

[7] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Dr.

alchemists—he stoically concluded that it would do his soul good to be burned:

> The Anatomy which I have made of pain, that pains are good, being a fire transmutative and altering for the better and improving together with the joys following upon the said pain, made that when I was carried from Germany to come in the inquisition, where I continued ten months, when they told me that they would burn me and that they would put me to the Rack, I asked them whether I should have no justice done me, and they told me, no. I only said that if it were so I was happier than severall great Princes who are racked as bad and cannot see their tormentors, whereas I should have the advantage as to see him. And besides whatsoever punishment happens to a man that is innocent, it doth him much good. And as to burning, I considered and balanced the thing on both sides whether it were better to be burnt, or no. I after all found more for than against burning, that is my arguments concluded it rather better to be burnt if it should come to that.[8]

Van Helmont's mind was eased to such a point by this decision that he settled down to write a book! It was entitled the *Alphabet of Nature* and was to launch his career as an author. The book was not published until 1667, but the frontispiece shows clearly the circumstances in which it was conceived. Van Helmont is pictured sitting at a table in his dark prison cell at Rome.

A remarkable picture of van Helmont as both a religious and social radical emerges from the inquisitorial documents relating to his case. Although some of the charges brought against him were clearly exaggerated, they reveal his commitment to a degree of religious tolerance and social equality that was virtually unthinkable at the time he lived, except among radical sectarians, whose ideas had clearly influenced him deeply. The fact that van Helmont's arrest by the Inquisition came at the beginning of his career, before he had published anything in his own name, calls for a reversal of the normal historical approach. In van Helmont's case, to understand whatever truth lay behind the charges against him can only be discovered after the fact, by reading what he wrote in later years. Once this is done, it becomes clear that by the time of van Helmont's arrest, his philosophy was in place. Some thirty years after his imprisonment, van Helmont's close friend Tobias Ludwig Kohlhans, made precisely this point. Kohlhans, who by that time was a Quaker, wrote a critique of the recently published history of the Quakers by Gerard Croese. He faulted Croese for suggesting that van Helmont had only recently adopted his kabbalistic philosophy. As Kohlhans says, anyone who knew van Helmont well would realize that he had been a consistent advocate of the same philosophy throughout his entire adult life. Exactly what that philosophy was and from where it came will be discussed in later chapters. But before that can be done, the reasons for van Helmont's arrest and subsequent release by the Inquisition must be examined.

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[8] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fols. Cr.(-Dv).

The documents relating to van Helmont's case reveal as much about the Inquisition as they do about van Helmont.[9] Modern historiography tends to applaud the Inquisition for its relative scrupulousness and fairness in collecting and assessing evidence and to give inquisitorial courts higher marks in these respects than most secular courts.[10] The proceedings against van Helmont support this interpretation to some extent, but undermine it in others. The case against van Helmont was carefully orchestrated by the Inquisition, which was not above fabricating evidence to ensure the charges would stick. The inquisitors were quite prepared to manipulate witnesses if necessary, by threatening them with excommunication, a serious matter at the time because it entailed social and economic ostracism as well as eternal damnation. Secrecy was to be the watch word of the proceedings. All this comes out clearly in the instructions sent by Cardinal Franceso Barberini to the Nuncio, Marcus Gallio, in Cologne on November 19, 1661. These instructions go a long way to corroborate the stereotype of the Inquisition as a sinister presence manipulating events behind the scenes. Barberini warns Gallio of the extreme delicacy of the situation and advises him to proceed with the greatest discretion and secrecy. Because of van Helmont's fame and his residency in the Protestant Netherlands, the Nuncio should conceal the Inquisition's involvement in the case and make it look as if the proceedings had been instigated solely at the request of the Duke of Neuburg. Barberini then outlines the steps Gallio should take to ensure that the strongest possible case be prepared against van Helmont.

Yet, for all these machinations, the instructions make it clear that the Inquisition was not all powerful and that it would have to prove its case sufficiently if it were to have any legitimacy. Barberini even suggests that it might be prudent to drop the whole matter because of van Helmont's connections and try "in a more pleasing manner to rescue the Palatine Count" [Christian August] from van Helmont's influence by replacing van Helmont "with some learned and pious Catholic who would strengthen him in the true faith."[11] Barberini only mentions two charges against van Helmont in this letter of instruction, his reputed attempt to subvert the faith of Christian August and his supposed "judaizing." The reasons why van Helmont was accused of being a "Judaizer" and the extent to which Christians of all denominations were obsessed with Judaism and Judaizers in the seventeenth century will come up repeatedly in this and later chapters.

Further charges against van Helmont emerge in the testimony of Baron Franz von Gise, the Catholic Chancellor of Pfalz-Neuburg. Gise clearly had doubts about van Helmont's orthodoxy. But when asked to give examples of specific heretical beliefs, he had difficulty and attributed this to van Helmont's ability to "twist" meanings. The best that Gise could do was to

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[9] These documents are transcribed and translated in Appendix 1, pp. 350-72.

[10] See, for example, Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition* (1609-1614); Henningsen and Tedeschi, eds., *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe.*

[11] Appendix 1, p. 351 (Italian, p.363).

say that van Helmont's unorthodoxy was a matter of common rumor, as was his judaizing:

> I add, to throw further light on this subject, that I often argued with the Prince about religion, and whenever Helmont was present, I found he disagreed with me. Nevertheless he so twisted his meaning that I could not find him openly denying any article of faith. This is all I am able to depose, except that it was a common rumor that he cherished many heretical notions, to the point that he was soaked with Judaism [ut Judaismo tinctus sit].[12]

Gise reveals the social and political dimensions of van Helmont's criticism of the Catholic Church. He recalled a journey he took with Christian August and van Helmont from Dusseldorf to Cologne. When mention was made of the splendor of the Churches in Cologne, "Helmont contended that sumptuous churches of this sort were not pleasing to the supreme deity." The orthodox Gise was clearly taken aback at van Helmont's insistence that simplicity should characterize Church edifices in the same way that humility and poverty should characterize Christian behavior:

> I put before him the temple at Jerusalem, the costly churches built by Constantine the Great at Rome and elsewhere, and the continuing respect for antiquity. When I noticed that he still maintained his opinion, I asked him, how should churches be built? He answered, in the manner of the Capuchins, with an appearance of humility (as far as I can remember).[13]

During May and June, 1662, the Inquisition drew up a list of preliminary charges against van Helmont. The narrative part of the document, which introduces the list of specific charges, gives an extraordinary picture of life in Sulzbach, where Prince and subjects work side by side, interspersing their labors with Hebrew lessons, Bible study, and communal meals. For all the Inquisition's manifest hostility, the picture does ring true. The very things the Inquisitors most hated about van Helmont's beliefs and behavior—his intellectual curiosity, especially when it came to religion, his tolerance, and his lack of class consciousness—were the most characteristic and memorable things about him. The Inquisitors view van Helmont's tolerant outlook in the worst possible light, as a sign of his duplicity, amorality, and essential atheism. He is, in their opinion, a dangerous radical, whose ideas undermine the institutional authority and hierarchical relationships essential in any well-ordered society:

> Francis Mercury van Helmont, doctor and alchemist, following his inner light (some fifth essence), seems to have attached himself to new beliefs from a variety of religions (since he is a critic and scoffer of all of them). [He is] a man who wanders about, an attendant in the courts of idle princes, among whom he represents himself as a Catholic, even appearing to confess and take communion, because if he openly professed another religion, he would not be able to take shelter in the courts of many princes. But at the same time he accuses the Catholic Church of errors and is thus agreeable and accepted by non-Catholics,

[12] Appendiz 1, pp. 360 (Latin, p. 371).
[13] ibid.

> and, like a chameleon, when he wishes he takes on various religious colors. Among the Hebrews he lives in this way, so that at some time there was a public report that he had been circumcised. He is also a friend of Anabaptists and Quakers, whose opinions, if he does not follow them, nevertheless he not only praises them greatly on account of their wool working and other customary skills, but, when he can, he lives with them familiarly. He is trying to bring [them] from Holland, where the seeds of all heresies sprout forth with impunity, into the courts of princes or into the states and cities ruled by them.[14]

The Inquisitors share Phillipp Wilhelm's concern about van Helmont's baneful influence on Christian August. They hold van Helmont responsible for introducing the Prince to sectarians and Jews in Holland and blame him for encouraging the Sulzbach residents to read the prohibited works of Protestants and mystics:

> Yea, he had the temerity and impudent audacity to induce a certain prince of the Roman Empire to travel incognito with him in Holland to see in person how Quakers, Jews, and Anabaptists carry out their devotions from the light within and busy themselves with madness. Then he brought to Sulzbach a colony of Hebrews, Anabaptists, and especially Quakers (under the name of Dutch or Dutch Lutheran artisans), who have been educated in diverse trades and equally educated to have assemblies by the instinct of the light within, which, they say, they hear inside and are moved by. They use no other books than Tauler, who is even criticized by Luther, and, as they say, published in a corrected edition, and also a certain Matthew Weyer, Jacob Boehme, and books of Luther, which are read in a loud voice at the table of the Catholic prince by Helmont's authority. These books are secretly recommended to Catholics. It was not permitted for any bookbinder, under the gravest penalty, to show for inspection to any man any page of these books or of any others carried off from Holland by these dregs of men, until Helmont ordered it.[15]

Van Helmont's unorthodox teachings are singled out as a source of social anarchy and religious enthusiasm. The fact that he encourages gentlemen and craftsmen to mingle and the sons of "citizens" to become skilled artisans is taken as evidence of a dangerous kind of social leveling. Even more suspicious is the teaching of Hebrew in Sulzbach. The Inquisitors were clearly not in favor of lay interpretations of Scripture:

> The non-Catholic artisans invited to Sulzbach (to the number of twenty families), having set up workshops in separate houses, even began to frequent the court itself, evidently so that the prince might be induced to work among them more easily, and they began to shun the courts, which look after the public administration and the good government of its subjects. And so that the sons of the citizens might thoroughly learn the arts of these craftsmen, the schools are deserted and the education of the youth begins to be neglected so that the citizens are compelled more easily to apply their sons to the learning of these new crafts, so that they are steeped in the poison of the new religion. In order that the appearance of the old religion might remain, since the greater part of the Bible is written in the Hebrew language, they learn and teach the Hebrew language, in which both the prince and his daughters are steeped, first in the early morning for one or two hours. Next, everyone goes to work, taking up his

[14] Appendix 1, p. 352 (Latin, pp. 363).
[15] ibid.

> weaving or some other craft. Finally, they approach the kitchen pots (a shameful matter) to cook their food and they dare to invite the prince himself on the authority of Helmont, so that he might eat (says that teacher) of the labor of his hands and according to the Apostle: he who does not work, does not eat. Immediately afterwards they run to and fro through the workshops of the different craftsmen; nay, there is not a worker among them who does not work as smiths at the anvil with their hammers grasped or draw thread with the cobblers so that, in this manner, just as Anabaptists say, they might put charity and duty before profit. Now and then they suddenly rush into the woods so that they may see the inner light and be moved to speech by it. They say among themselves that in the midst of their work they see visions of angels, wonderful evidence on account of which they teach that princes ought to abandon the management of their affairs, that they ought not to hamper these illuminations of the soul with any consideration of justice or for any other reason.[16]

After these general observations, the document goes on to specify "the Errors and Teachings of Helmont." The charges catalogue a variety of social and religious "heresies," involving both doctrinal issues and the minutiae of daily life in Sulzbach. For example, charges 1-5, 9 and 10 characterize the ways in which van Helmont undermines Catholicism in general and Christian August's Catholicism in particular by denying the authority, practices, and teachings of the Catholic Church. Charges 6 and 11, on the other hand, provide further specific examples of the ways in which van Helmont undermined social and class distinctions. He is accused of encouraging the Prince to fraternize with artisans, to work with his own hands, and to walk when it would be more appropriate for the Prince to ride in his coach and six. In addition, he is too familiar with the Prince and does not address him with due formality. Charges 7 and 8 are more difficult to categorize and even fully comprehend. In the first, van Helmont is accused of denying the value of oath taking. This may reflect his early interest in the Quakers, who refused to take oaths and whom he would later join. The claim made in charge 8 that van Helmont rejected capital punishment and, indeed, any punishment for crime mentions the specific case of a mother who killed her son and was apparently exonerated. I have been unable to uncover the details of this case, but it may indicate that at the time of his arrest van Helmont rejected the concept of retributive justice, a view that later appears in his and von Rosenroth's translation of Pisani's *Lycurgus Italicus*. In their overt hostility to van Helmont the Inquisitors may have interpreted his criticism of the current legal system as an outright rejection of any system.

> The Errors and Teachings of Helmont
>
> 1. He is accustomed to say that there is no learned man or teacher besides Christ. He adds that no one is learned or holy.
>
> 2. He persuaded someone [Christian August] to call back his daughters from Belgium, where they were educated virtuously as Catholics, desiring them to learn to see visions from the light within at home near their father and without teachers.

[16] Appendix 1, pp. 352-3 (Latin, pp. 364).

3. He blamed a certain nobleman [Christian August] because having converted from Lutheranism, he made a profession of the Catholic faith, which was not necessary. He turned the same man away from a good intention with the result that he did not promulgate the new Gregorian calendar among his subjects.

4. Occasionally he was heard to say that anyone is able to be saved in his own faith according to his own inner light and the light of conscience.[17]

5. He secretly led a certain prince [Christian August], converted to the Catholic faith, into Transylvania, Moravia, Bohemia, and Holland and there promised him that he would truly discover faithful Christians. As an intimate friend of that prince, he is thought to have arranged, by means of his advice, first, that the prince sent away the Jesuits, then the Capuchins, and finally he brought in Jews and Dutch craftsmen, who now live in the house in which the Jesuits formerly lived.

6. He wished to persuade the same prince that no one is permitted to enjoy six horses and a four-wheel carriage or to live in the customary fashion of other princes, but that he must spend his life working and laboring like ordinary citizens.

7. He said that no man should be believed, even though he took an oath; therefore no one should require an oath because it could not hold.

8. He thought that crimes should not be punished and he tried to prove that a magistrate might actually take no notice of the worst crimes of the flesh and that incest and adultery might remain unpunished and that a certain mother who killed her son might be freely discharged without punishment. Indeed, no one was permitted to condemn another to death.

9. He teaches that the Bible was not correctly translated. Therefore it is necessary to learn the Hebrew language thoroughly to understand the true meaning. Moreover, that many books in the Bible ought to be burned because the teachings derived from these books were hateful, except for that which was revealed and taught about the inner light.

10. He is accustomed to speak insultingly of the Catholic religion and Catholic church, of its hierarchy, clergy, and ceremonies, and he ascribed to pride and avarice the very costly garments in churches and he censures other fundamentals [of the Church].

11. He does not show respect for princes. When he wrote letters to that prince, whose friend he was and whom he led through various countries and confused with new opinions, he did not begin with any title but merely with, "I have received your letter." Nor did he sign his name.[18]

The document does not end with this list of charges. In addition to all his erroneous teachings and examples of improper behavior van Helmont is criticized for having pig pens built in the palace gardens. The Inquisitors take this as a clear indication of the dangers of the "inner light":

> Whatever things are revealed to Helmont by the inner light are nothing but trifling, laughable matters of a very dark mind—for example, the filthy pig pens, which, like a murderous money-lender [sicarius negotiator], Helmont tried to persuade the prince to build in abundance (within the palace grounds),

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[17] While some Catholic theologians believed that certain non-Christians might be saved by following the divine law of nature, the overwhelming majority did not believe salvation was possible outside of the Church and without explicit belief in Christ. Cf. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* Sullivan shows that it was only during Vatican II that the possibility of salvation outside of the Catholic Church was officially accepted as possible.

[18] Appendix 1, p. 353-4 (Latin, pp. 365).

> where the flock of pigs might feed. Thus, the courtyard of the prince would look like a farm or rustic dwelling.[19]

To understand this charge about "the filthy pig pens," it needs to be pointed out that Christian August had asked for van Helmont's advice about restoring the shattered economy of the Sulzbach territories. Van Helmont suggested various farming and manufacturing activities, among which was apparently the raising of pigs.[20] It may be stretching things too far, but the fact that van Helmont is likened to "a murderous money lender" immediately after these pig pens are mentioned raises, at least in my mind, the specter of anti-Semitism and the motif of the *Judensau.*[21] These issues are discussed more fully in a later chapter.

It is interesting to compare this preliminary list of charges to the formal indictment eventually issued against van Helmont. While both documents stress van Helmont unorthodox and heretical ideas and emphasize the role he has played in bringing heretics of all types to Sulzbach, this preliminary document lays greater emphasis on the social and political implications of his ideas and activities. The final indictment, which consists of twenty three specific charges, was not completed until July 5, 1662, nine months after van Helmont's arrest. These charges reveal how vulnerable the Catholic Church was to attack and the many sides from which Church officials expected this attack: from Protestantism and the innumerable proliferating sects of spiritualists, who rejected the kind of centralized religious authority represented by the Papacy; from atheism; from magic, occultism, and alchemy; and also from science, or natural philosophy. But the greatest threat arose from the liberal theology and ecumenism that characterized van Helmont's thought. According to the eleventh charge, also made in the first indictment, van Helmont believed anyone could be saved in any religion: "The same Helmont maintains without doubt that anyone in his own faith, or whatever

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[19] Appendix 1, p. 354 (Latin, p. 365).

[20] Van Helmont mentions this in his *Memoirs.*

[21] Jews were frequently compared to animals, an effective way to dehumanize them. One has only to remember Shakespeare's reference to Shylock as the "Jew dog." But only in Germany were Jews also depicted together with swine. The motif of the *Judensau* has been painstakingly (and painfully) documented by Shachar. Shachar describes the truly disgusting carvings on churches and cathedrals as well as the many illustrations in which Jews are shown being suckled by pigs and eating their excrement. He argues that this stereotyping of Jews was an important factor in making it all but impossible for men of the Enlightenment and later ages to extend their sympathy to Jews as fellow human beings: ". . .the attitude expressed in the *Judensau* towards the Jews is not just scurrilous. There was a further element or sub-motif present in all its representations: the Jews belong to the sow, the sow to the Jews. These people, in other words, belong to another and abominable category of beings; they are the sow's offspring and turn to their mother for their proper nourishment. . . . The Jews are by this association with the animal, implicitly but clearly labeled as not being human "like Us": not, as the German would put it, *unsereiner*. . . . It would not be necessary to mention this partly concealed meaning if the question of the common humanity of the Jews had not become so important in Germany since the eighteenth century. In that connection the long association of Jew and sow assumes historical significance, for it was then that its latent psychological impact became clear. If it was so impossible for men in the age of Enlightenment, and later, to conceive of the Jews as their fellow humans, it was not just because of religious differences but also because of less conscious factors" (Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History*, p. 3).

kind, may be saved."[22] This conviction undermined the entire rationale for the Catholic Church as an institution.

The charges against van Helmont in the final indictment are staggering in their breadth as well as contradictory, which may be an indication of the Inquisition's hostility as well as its frustration. Van Helmont was accused of masquerading as a Franciscan while at the same time following the precepts of Quakers, Anabaptists, and Jews; but he is also accused of being an atheist. He was charged with attributing to natural causes what the Church deemed miraculous, namely the preservation of the bodies of saints (charge 12) and of subscribing to occult medical theories:

> It happened recently during the last year that while in the woods, working as a carpenter, he was engaged in chopping down trees for fire wood (really!), and being too little wary of certain of these heavy trees, a branch, having been cut from below (which by a certain solemn cry raised to the heavens he had set apart for use in weaving) fell down with violence on his right shoulder, so that, falling supine on the ground and having been gravely wounded, he was only with difficulty able to protect himself from the full weight of this. He did not wish to be cured from this injury in any other way than by applying to himself pieces of the aforesaid cut tree. Rising from the ground with a faltering step on account of his debility, he embraced the fallen tree and thus he reconciled himself to the tree, forgiven for its offense. He stoutly maintained this opinion, just as clearly as atheism, so that he took this as a sure remedy for wounds of any kind.[23]

We have already seen that the elder van Helmont's medical theories, as well as his attempt to describe the power of relics in natural terms, brought him before the Inquisition. It is a indication of the younger van Helmont's indebtedness to his father's ideas that similar charges were brought against him.

On a doctrinal level, the younger van Helmont was accused of rejecting the efficacy of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. Worst of all, the Inquisition claimed that he denied the key Catholic doctrines of Christ's incarnation, passion, and resurrection and interpreted these in a purely allegorical way. In addition to denying established Church doctrine, van Helmont is once again accused of being an antinomian, whose presence in Sulzbach signals the end of law and order. The case of the mother murderess is cited as decisive evidence:

> claiming to be the companion and brother of the Prince, not his guest, he brought about a grave crisis for that Prince by the false errors of his teaching that it was nearly a universal opinion, according to him [Helmont], that neither fornication, incest, nor adultery (chapter 38 Genesis), indeed, no wrong doing whatsoever should be punished. He calmly defended this position, so that it soon happened that this doctrine was fastened, by order of the superiors, to the accustomed doors of the Chancellery and courts just like a new decree or statute. Immediately afterwards, a certain woman, accused of killing her own child and publicly and openly convicted, was set free with impunity.[24]

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[22] Appendix 1, p. 357 (Latin, p. 38).
[23] ibid., p. 358-9 (Latin, p. 369).
[24] ibid., p. p. 356-7 (Latin, 367-8).

Van Helmont's refusal to behave in a way appropriate for someone of his background and station in life comes up again in another charge. His willingness to engage in manual labor is taken as clear proof that he is an Anabaptist:

> [It will be testified] that, according to the custom of Anabaptists he applies himself to all sorts of labor. Now he sweats in weaving, now in taking up the hammer at the anvil of the smiths, then in the awls of shoemakers, and around the cooking pots in the market place. And he has been appointed to sing from the Hebrew scriptures at any place whatsoever and at whatever labor first thing in the morning. So openly known is this that he himself will not, perchance, deny it when interrogated vigorously.[25]

Sandwiched between all these charges, the charge of subverting the religious beliefs of Christian August comes as something of an anticlimax. But whoever drew up the indictment is acutely aware that the situation in Germany must be carefully monitored; one Protestant Reformation is quite enough:

> Truly, the Office of the Holy Roman Inquisition would do a great favor to God and something very profitable to the saving of souls if it imprisoned Helmont (so often mentioned) so that he is not able by wandering in these parts to cause more trouble. Especially since it is more than sufficiently known how great an error there formerly was in this matter, which is now experienced. How grievous, O Germany, that Luther was so poorly watched.[26]

Van Helmont's imprisonment greatly upset Christian August. Feeling to a large degree responsible, he wrote two letters to Pope Alexander VII, complaining of van Helmont's treatment and protesting his innocence.[27] He had a book published with fulsome testimonies of van Helmont's orthodoxy.[28] In addition, he dispatched Johann Abraham Poemer as his emissary to the Neuburg court to protest Phillip Wilhelm's role in van Helmont's arrest and to defend his innocence. A record of the report Poemer gave to Christian August on his return exists in the Munich archives. Poemer describes in detail what he said on Christian August's behalf. His report reveals the delicate personal and political relationship between the cousins:

> Your Highness [Christian August] regretted that His Highness of Neuburg did show such little affection and esteem while Your Highness did exercise all reverence and patience and sought to serve Your Princely Highness as a friend and cousin.
>
> You did admit that Your Highness' greatest hurt lay in the fact that Herr. v. Helmont was taken prisoner for your sake, had not been taken before a judge, had neither been arraigned nor found guilty, and was to be led from Germany to the Inquisition. For all these reasons your conscience claimed redress and you demanded that he be set free. However, let the lord who judges fairly and can demand redress for Herr von Helmont's false imprisonment and also the

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[25] Appendix 1, p. 358. (Latin, p. 369).

[26] ibid., p. 59. (Latin, p. 370).

[27] The letters were dated 19 March and 3 April 1662. *Aktenmassige Geschichte*, pp. 248-9, 250-1, 259; *Theatrum Europaeum*, ed. Martin Meyer, IX, 1672, p. 520.

[28] *Testimonia Catholica Generosi Domini Francisci Mercurii Baronis ab Hellmont, ejusdem nativitatem, fidem et vitam contestantia* (Ambergae, Typis Joannis Burger, 1662).

> Holy Roman Empire whose interests are at stake, consider this occurrence. (You said) that you lacked the might to withstand such a powerful prince, tied as he is to relatives of royal and electoral parentage, and that you desired peace rather than disquiet. However, as far as honor and reputation were concerned, Your Highness would not cede place to anyone. . . . As to what Your Highness had learned of Herr van Helmont, he was a blameless knight and that even though his morals were not the usual ones, neither the Elector of Mainz nor of the Palatine had taken objection to them. Helmont was neither a heretic nor led people astray. If anyone averred the contrary, let him bring proof to his Highness. On this score the Holy Roman Empire had conducted itself wisely, justly, and with magnanimity.
>
> If Your Highness had had any inkling to the contrary, he would have given him friendly warning and never have consented to it [van Helmont's unorthodoxy]. And, as Herr von Helmont would readily confirm, You had never voiced any religious doubts and that wherever You went and with whomsoever You had dealings, Your conduct has been that of a good Catholic and that You had been present at various times when Herr van Helmont had conducted himself similarly. If this meets with disbelief, no one but God himself could possibly bring about a change of thought. Not even Our Savior could do it when the Pharisees wanted to coerce him to accept the devil and Beelzebub as his masters. Therefore, You never felt any call to attract Quakers or fanatics. No one could truthfully aver the contrary, let alone make out that You went to the Netherlands for this reason.[29]

Philipp Wilhem eventually responded to Christian August's entreaties for an explanation of his actions. He published a short pamphlet with the long title, *Motives and Reasons why the illustrious Prince and Lord, Lord Philipp Wilhelm, Palatine Count of the Rhine, etc. wished to take Franciscus Mercurius, Baron of Helmont, prisoner in Kutzingen and from there to allow him to be taken to Rome finally communicated to Christian August, Palatine Count of the Rhine, by the express orders of the Prince.* Christian August rushed a rebuttal into print (See appendix 2 for both these documents.) To Philipp Wilhelm's charge that van Helmont was both a Judaizer and "the founder of the Quakers,"[30] Christian August sarcastically responds: "This is also thoroughly denied since it would be a strange metamorphosis and alteration if this person who was so shortly before a Jew should now be the head of the Quakers." He ends his rebuttal with a testimony to van Helmont's "blameless life" and religious orthodoxy:

> Now may each person freely judge for himself whether such a person, a person who has received sincere and public testimonies from the highest spiritual authorities in Brussels and from other pious Churchmen on account of his blameless life and purity in the Catholic religion, should have been imprisoned on account of these fables and fairy tales and taken across the borders of the Empire and into Italy to the Inquisition. If the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Neuburg, etc. had other more important reasons and yet wished to keep them back, the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach does not doubt that these, in as far as these will be communicated to him, will be denied just as easily.[31]

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[29] Appendix 1, p. 355 (German, p. 366).
[30] Appendix 2, p. 373 (German, p. 375).
[31] ibid., pp. 374 (German, p. 377).

The fact that Christian August felt justified in saying this when it is clear (and will become clearer in the course of this book) that van Helmont's ideas were highly unorthodox suggests that Christian August's own orthodoxy was problematical. This indeed was the case. Wappmann argues that by 1658, three years after his conversion, there is no evidence that Christian August was strongly committed to Catholicism. On the contrary, he tried to get the Catholics in his employ to share his interests, particularly in Hebrew. His support of spiritualist Lutherans like Fabricius, Brawe, and Florinus certainly suggested to Philipp Wilhelm that his allegiance to the Catholic Church was not what it should be.[32] Christian August pursued a policy that had the express intention of turning Sulzbach into a haven for the unorthodox. While there may not have been twenty Quaker families in Sulzbach, as the Inquisition alleged in its indictment, many people with highly questionable beliefs settled there from 1658 onwards, drawn largely by van Helmont and because of the extraordinary degree of tolerance Christian August permitted. There was even a report by Father Vet Wies that once while in Dusseldorf, Christian August had said to him, "That a man living virtuously in any religion could be saved." Father Wies tried to argue against this heretical idea by quoting the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, but Christian August remained unconvinced. Further evidence of Christian August's unusual ecumenism emerges from the fact that he had his son, Johann August Hiël, born shortly before his conversion to Catholicism, baptized as a Lutheran.[33]

Christian August's campaign to obtain van Helmont's release was successful. Early in 1663, after a year and a half in prison, van Helmont was freed and left Rome. Following a meeting of the Cardinals of the Holy Office, Petro Pierucci received a directive from Cardinal Pallavicini, which he sent on to Philipp Wilhelm. Pallavincini claims there simply was not enough evidence to convict van Helmont. He suggests that Philipp Wilhelm and Christian August were largely responsible for this, each, of course, in a very different way:

> our Lord resolved that your Highness should use some piety, moderation, and prudence in considering that Helmont was arrested without any proof at your first warning and instance and made to come to Rome, imprisoned with suffering and deprived of his freedom, and that he was held prisoner a long time, waiting and asking for proof and the deposition of witnesses, on the basis of which the necessary orders [for his arrest] were given from the beginning. But, since no proof has arrived, and because the people called upon did not give depositions or because, scattered in various places far away, they could not be had, the Sacred Congregation could not reasonably keep him imprisoned any longer, nor proceed against him. Considering also the Prince of Sulzbach, who is so infuriated about it [this matter], that, if he should see the imprisonment continue without any basis of proof, he would believe that his Holiness and the

[32] Wappmann, *Durchbruch*, p. 187.
[33] ibid., pp. 109-110; "che vivendo virtuosamente in ogni Religion passa l'huomo salvarsi."

> Sacred Congregation must have political motives to throw themselves upon an injured party.[34]

Van Helmont describes how he purposely stayed in prison for an extra seventeen days after his official release, hoping to force his accusers to give him some explanation for his arrest: "I stay'd 17 days in prison beyond the time that they had given me most free liberty to go out of prison, the reason was because they would not give me any account why they had put me there at first."[35] His jailers showed van Helmont a book which had been published against him in Vienna. This may have been the pamphlet published by Philipp Wilhelm. Van Helmont refused to read it, however, taking the philosophical position that a man must be judged by his actions, and not by anything written about him:

> But I refused to read that Book, for I knew before what it tended to, and I pitied the Author and all his Abettors, and I gave to him the same answer which I gave to Cardinal Rospylios,[36] being a man of great wisdom and Experience, who proferred me letters testimoniall of my innocence. Whereupon I answered him by demanding of him whether if he were young again and about to be married to some young lady, of whose virgin innocency there would be letters testimoniall produced as proof thereof, he would the rather believe her to be such; whereupon he smilingly replied, No. Neither do I, I said, desire any such thing. And further I said to him, would you have me carry them upon my breast that everyone might read them, and in case I should loose them, my credit which depends upon them will be gone with them. No, I had rather have bad letters writ of me, that I might have occasion to confute them with my life. My reflexion upon this Book coming out against me was that it was thus ordered by the Lord that my Honours might be blotted out by writing as they were given by writing.[37]

Van Helmont concludes his account of his imprisonment with a characteristically optimistic statement and one that echoes the outcome of his first and dangerous meeting with Christian August. Describing his return to Germany, he says: "indeed I found that I had lost nothing, for I was at my return treated by all the princes of Germany with a great deal of kindness, so that I rather gained in their esteem than lost by it."[38]

Van Helmont's evaluation of his situation was correct. After a short stay at Heidelberg he returned to Sulzbach no worse for his experience and proceeded to exert an even greater influence on Christian August than ever before. His acquittal was crucial for the continuance of Christian August's policy of toleration in Sulzbach, for he was Christian August's strongest supporter. Sometime after 1663 he introduced another Protestant to the Sulzbach court, Christian Knorr van Rosenroth (1636-1689), a scholar and statesman who was installed as Chancellor (*Hofkanzleirat*) by Christian August on

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[34] Appendix 1, p. 361 (Italian, p. 371-2).
[35] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Gr.
[36] Secretary of State to Pope Alexander VII, who later became Pope Clement IX.
[37] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Hv.
[38] ibid.

July 14, 1668.[39] Stimulated by Knorr's arrival, van Helmont and Christian August continued to study occult and mystical ideas under the very eyes of the Catholic party, who took no further action against van Helmont.

[39] Salecker, *von Rosenroth*, pp. 42ff.

CHAPTER FOUR

VAN HELMONT'S *ALPHABET OF NATURE*

Up to the time of Knorr von Rosenroth's arrival in Sulzbach, van Helmont had published nothing of his own, except for the short preface to his father's collected works. With Knorr's encouragement and collaboration the two friends began a fruitful period of writing and published three books in the course of the next two years: a translation of Octavius Pisani's *The Italian Lycurgus* in 1666, and in 1667 a translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and van Helmont's *Kurtzer Entwurff des eigenlichen Naturalphabets der heiligen Sprache*, with a preface written by Knorr.[1] These books were published at the newly established press set up at Sulzbach and jointly financed by van Helmont, Knorr, and Christian August.

Van Helmont's and Knorr's decision to translate Pisani's work is significant; it reveals their life-long interest in the reform and improvement of society. Pisani was a lawyer and scholar who lived in Antwerp in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He felt that the legal profession was in need of reform, but realized that the reforms he advocated could only be made in the wider context of a fundamental reorganization of society. He took the modern view that crime was the product of social ills. To prevent it, one had to think in terms of improved education, health, and welfare. Van Helmont and Knorr shared Pisani's belief. They dedicated their translation to Christian August's daughter Hedwig Augusta, hoping to bring Pisani's unusual and comprehensive suggestions to the attention of those who had the power and authority to implement them.

The fact that Knorr and van Helmont chose to translate Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is equally significant in terms of their own outlook and philosophy. Like Boethius, Knorr and van Helmont were philosophers and statesman, deeply concerned with the issue of justice. They shared Boethius's Neoplatonic and Stoic orientation and concurred with his view that true happiness can be found only in God, who is the highest good. A constant theme in all van Helmont's and Knorr's writing is that real evil does not exist because God is all powerful and all good. Everything that happens to an individual happens for his ultimate benefit; virtue is never unrewarded, just as vice is always punished. These were the major themes in Boethius's work. Like Boethius, van Helmont and Knorr made no distinction between philosophy and theology; they venerated philosophy as the key to theological truth, just as theology was the key to philosophical truth.

Boethius wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy* while he was in prison and faced with the possibility of execution, the same conditions under which van

[1] For full titles and editions see bibliography.

Helmont began to work on his first book, *Kurtzer Entwurff des eigenlichen Naturalphabets der heiligen Sprache*. In this work, van Helmont made a preliminary synthesis of his father's philosophy and ideas taken from the Jewish Kabbalah. The product of this combination characterized van Helmont's thought from that time onwards. All his later writings are elaborations of the basic ideas which he first expressed here. It is a book which carries the stamp of a reformer, as the translation of Pisani did, but in a wholly Helmontian way. Francis Mercury van Helmont was convinced that man must reevaluate his relationship to God before he could hope to improve his relationship with other men. Serious study of Francis Mercury van Helmont's thought properly begins with this book. Up to this time his character and activities are seen primarily through the eyes of others. That fragmentary pictures assumes life and color once Francis Mercury begins to speak for himself.

The full title of van Helmont's book translated into English reads as follows, *A Most Compendious and truly Natural Draught of the Hebrew Alphabet, which at the same time furnishes a method whereby those who are born deaf may be so informed that they may not only understand others speaking but also may themselves arrive at the use of speech.*[2] It was not, as the title might suggest, a clinical treatise but a philosophical work arguing that Hebrew was the divine language of creation in which words exactly expressed the essential natures of things. Van Helmont contended that while time and ignorance had led to the corruption of Hebrew he had rediscovered its original form. He expected great things from this, believing it would bring an end to the religious controversies which had precipitated the Reformation and embittered its aftermath. He envisioned a natural Hebrew alphabet by which men would live in religious peace and social harmony.

Van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* (a convenient abridgment of the title) is a utopian work and one of the many books written on the subject of a natural language during the seventeenth century. The belief that symbols and sounds could reflect reality and therefore be "natural" or "real" rather than conventional had a long history before Helmont wrote his own book. His commitment to this idea at the very time it was being discredited shows how deeply his thought was embedded in that of an earlier age. He accepted the arguments and examples offered by Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, and Kabbalists to prove that visual images and sounds were intimately connected with reality.

The *Alphabet of Nature* consists of a series of dialogues between M and H; presumably these initials stand for Mercury and his *alter ego* Helmont. The dialogue form was a favorite of van Helmont, and he made frequent use of it in his subsequent works. It fits well with his approach to knowledge and

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[2] This is the seventeenth century English translation written by hand in a Latin edition of van Helmont's book (now in the Scholem library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem). For titles and editions, see the bibliography. An English edition is advertised in Amman, *The Talking Deaf Man*, "Advertisement to the English Reader," but I have been unable to locate any copy.

method of inquiry. He was not didactic but preferred to make his points by leading his reader on with questions and answers.[3] One of his admirers describes this essentially Socratic method:

> From the conversation we for some time had with him we had observed that he made use of an ancient Philosophical way of discoursing, propounding all his Matters in Queries, and that very dexterously; inasmuch that when any one according to his own pleasure, thinks of something in his mind, be it what it will, he, by means of his Queries, concerning the circumstances of the thing, all depending upon one another as the links of a chain, and the Answers returned to his Questions, would infallibly find out and name the thing, the party had concealed in his mind and thought of.[4]

By following this method van Helmont actually wrote very little himself. Instead he found people willing to ask him questions and record his answers. He continued this practice to the end of his life. Four years before his death, his good friend Benjamin Furly wrote to John Locke that he feared he would never see van Helmont again, for he had left Rotterdam "to find men that will ask him questions, or answer his, which he always complains he cannot find."[5] For all his complaints, however, van Helmont was extremely fortunate in those he found to question him and help him with his writing, for they included Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Society, George Keith, a leading Quaker, Benjamin Clark, an established Quaker publisher, Dr. Daniel Foote, a respected member of the Royal Society, and Johan Conrad Amman, a noted authority on the deaf. In addition to these, he was helped by Benjamin Furly, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who actually wrote the last book published in van Helmont's name.[6] Furly also brought John Locke into the picture, sending him van Helmont's books and seeking his opinions about possible changes.

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[3] The dialogue form was also often used in texts dealing with medicine. See Multhauf, "Some nonexistent Chemists of the Seventeenth Century: Remarks on the Use of Dialogue in Scientific Writings." Shapin and Schaffer maintain that Robert Boyle's use of the dialogue form in his writings was one of the strategies he employed to gain acceptance for the experimental method (*Leviathan and the Air-pump*). Cf. van Dooren, "Der Dialog als Diskussionsform philosohischer und wissenschaftlicher Ansichten, insbesondere bei Leibniz und seinen Zeitgenossen."

[4] Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, preface, pp. 6-7. Many of van Helmont's other writings are cast in dialogue form or as queries and answers. For example:

1. *Two Hundred Queries moderately propounded concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of humane Souls, and its conformity with the Truth of the Christian Religion.*

2. "Appendix of several questions with their answers concerning the hypothesis of the revolution of humane souls." In *The Divine Being and its Attributes.*

3. *A Cabbalistic Dialogue Answer to Philosophy and Theology, that the World was made of Nothing,.*

[5] Furly to Locke 26 May/5 June 1694. *The Correspondence of John Locke*, V: 59ff. The unknown person to whom van Helmont dedicated his *Paradoxal Discourses* explicitly says in the preface that van Helmont told him that he did not write himself, and that, indeed he very rarely had time "to read over his own thoughts, by discourse communicated and writ down by others: and besides, had never yet met with any man that truly and throughly [sic] understood the meaning of his Mind, and who consequently could give a full and proper expression to it" (A4).

[6] See below, ch. 13.

Only in the case of Paulus Buchius did problems arise. Buchius brought a legal action against van Helmont to stop publication of one of their collaborative efforts, *The Divine Being and Its Attributes*. Buchius wanted to delay publication until his senile mother-in-law had entrusted her fortune to him. He feared the book's notoriety would cause her to disinherit him.[7]

As we have seen, van Helmont began the *Alphabet of Nature* while imprisoned by the Inquisition. The train of thought which led him to conclude that Hebrew is a "natural" language began with speculations about teaching a deaf mute to speak:

> And this is among other things that which occasioned my plain and simple discourse, at least for the most part, when I was in a certain place and robbed of all those supports which can give one the opportunity to work out a thing correctly, and I had no other remedy than to pass my time in thought. For then I had the chance to consider what I should do if I were on an island where nobody but deaf mutes lived and I wished to pass my life with entertainment and good conversation.[8]

That "certain place" was van Helmont's Inquisition cell in Rome. He was not robbed of "all supports," if the frontispiece of his book is an accurate portrayal. Here he is depicted sitting in a dark, vaulted room, the stone walls and metal bars illuminated by the light of a single candle. In elegant dress and comfortable slippers, he sits before a mirror, calipers in one hand and pen in the other. Clearly his dreamy speculations about his island adventure have taken a more practical turn. He realizes that a deaf person is not mute, except in rare cases, because of any physical deformity of the speaking organs, and he knows that deaf people can learn to understand words by lip-reading.[9]

From these general considerations van Helmont is led to his mirror and calipers. As one of the speakers in the dialogue reasons, if a deaf mute can learn to read words merely in the course of being spoken to, how much more quickly might he learn to understand and speak words from diagrams:

> certainly if it is possible for someone to draw a violin and picture the fingers in the very same order as one learns the art of violin playing, with the result that one could observe the pictures and learn to fiddle; and if it is possible to learn to place the feet as they are represented in a good illustration of the art of dancing; if the art of flag-waving, pike drill, food carving and the like may be represented and learned in a similar way: why should it not be possible to imitate and grasp the movements of the tongue and mouth in the same way?[10]

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[7] This is described in L. H. van Eegen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel 1680-1725*.

[8] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 166: "und dieses ist unter andern das jenige/ worauf mich/ was den mehertheil belanget/ meine blosse einfaltige Gedancken gebracht/ als ich an einem gewissen Ort beraubt war von allem/ was jemand gelegenheit geben kan/ eine Sache recht auszuwurcken/ und kein ander mittel hatte/ mein Zeit anders als mit Gedancken zuzubringen; Denn damals gab mir hierzu anlass eine betrachtung/ wie ich es nemlich anfangen solte/ dafern ich auf einer Insul ware/ da niemand/ als Taubgeb ohrne Leute wohneten/ wenn ich mein Leben mit gar guter Vergnugung und annehmlicher Conversation zubringen wolte."

[9] ibid., p. 2.

[10] ibid., pp. 5-6: ". . .gewisslich/ wenn es muglich ist/ dafern jemanden eine Giege furgemahlet wurde/ auf der die Finger in solcher ordnug abgebildet waren/ wie man der Kunst

His friend replies, "I do not doubt it."[11] In fact he says surprisingly that he has used this method himself with great success to teach a "deaf, weak-eyed and quivering musician" both German and Hebrew in remarkably short time.[12] What is even more surprising is that there was just such a person at Sulzbach, the composer Peter Meyer, who was deaf.[13]

By proving he could teach the deaf and dumb to read and speak Hebrew through pictures, Francis Mercury hoped to discredit the arguments brought against the concept of "natural" language. Thomas Erastus, the Swiss doctor and forceful critic of Paracelsus, was one of many who maintained that language was wholly a matter of convention. To prove this he cited the case of deaf mutes. Erastus reasons that if language is natural, meaning that if words and things are intimately connected, then deaf mutes could speak from birth. They would automatically know the names of things and hearing would be of no importance in learning a language.[14] By showing that deaf mutes could easily learn to speak Hebrew, van Helmont thought that he could demonstrate the two premises on which his theory of the natural alphabet was based: first, that there were such things as innate ideas; they had only to be activated to come into consciousness. And second, that the Hebrew language perfectly represented these innate ideas. Thus the case of deaf mutes was used by both those arguing for and against the conventional nature of language. The topic continued to generate endless debates in the following centuries.[15]

The first conversation ends with van Helmont's contention that he could teach the deaf to speak. The second leaves the subject of the deaf and dumb and turns to van Helmont's great interest and the main subject of the dialogues, the Hebrew language. There is, however, a continuity between the two dialogues, for the second opens with the provocative question: "Does the holy Hebrew language, then, have some correspondence with the movement

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nach greiffen solte/ dass man nach dem Bilde/ warhafftig so konte greiffen/ und hernach streichen lernen; Wenn es muglich/ dass man aus wohl abgebildeter Tantz-Kunst die Fusse so konte setzen lernen/ wie sie das Gemahlde vorstellet; Wenn sich das Fahnschwingen/ Piquenspielen/ Speisenzerlegen/ und dergleichen auf solche art vorstellen und erlenern lasset: wie solte nicht auch der Zungen und dess Mundes Bewegung sich auf solche art abbilden und fassen lassen."

[11] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 7: "Ich wil daran nicht sweiffeln. . . ."

[12] ibid.: ". . . an einem ganz tauben/ schwachsehenden und zitrenden Musicanten."

[13] Schindler, "Christian Knorr von Rosenroth 'Neuer Helikon' in der Sulzbacher Kirchenmuskpflege," p. 92.

[14] Thomas Erastus, *Disputationum de Medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi pars prima. . .* , p. 170: "Adde, quod surdi scirent loqui, tametsi neminem audiuissent loquentem, si nobiscum nasceretur sermo, & significatio eius esset naturalis. Ex quibus apertissime videmus, verba esse non a coelo, nec Natura significare, sed esse artificialia, & ex sola constitutione & consensu certorum hominum notas & signa cogitationum nostrarum facta esse."

[15] Diderot and Condillac were among those contributing to the debate about deaf mutes and "wild" children that became such a feature of the arguments for and against sensualism and materialism. See Ricken, *Linguistics, Anthropology and Philosophy in the French Enlightenment: Language, Theory and Ideology*, pp. 30ff., 90, 119ff., 155.

of the human tongue?"[16] The protagonist in van Helmont's dialogue answers with a forceful affirmative:

> It is nothing else but this and cannot be anything else because if it were otherwise, Hebrew would be just as incomprehensible, vain and dumb as all other languages and writing without exception.[17]

There are two interesting points in this statement. First, it implies that there is an exact correspondence between the movements made by the tongue sounding Hebrew letters and their written form. The written symbol is thus a picture of the tongue movements and just by reading the picture one can make the sound. Van Helmont actually draws the Hebrew letters as concatenations of tongues. Secondly, for some reason not yet apparent, this aspect of the Hebrew language places it above all other languages, which are "vain" and "dumb" in comparison.

Van Helmont was not a cautious man. At the very time he was in the dangerous position of a suspected heretic he sat down to write a book that reiterated the unorthodox opinions for which he was imprisoned. Truth was more important to van Helmont than life, and the truth he thought he had discovered was a blend of the Jewish Kabbalah and Christianity, which he believed would unite the religiously divided world. His reasoning went something like this: if Catholics, Protestants, and Jews agree in accepting the Old Testament as the revealed word of God, why, then, do they disagree so fundamentally about its meaning? For van Helmont the only possible explanation was that the text had been corrupted and people no longer understood it. Ignorance had led to disagreements, disagreements to divisions. These would vanish once the Bible was understood according to the principles of his natural Hebrew alphabet.

Van Helmont was convinced, as were many of his predecessors, though fewer of his contemporaries, that Hebrew was the divine language of creation.[18] When God said, "Let there be light," there was light and Psalm 103 clearly says, "by the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." In the Old Testament and particularly in Genesis sound is a powerful creative force. The word takes on an existence: it assails the chaos and rushes over it; the word of the Lord is "sent," "come," and "abides." There is also the prologue to the fourth Gospel with the concept of Christ as the *logos*, or "word" of God, through whom the world was created. To van Helmont these statements were the literal truth:

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[16] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 8: "Hat den die Heilige Hebreische Schrifft einige gleichheit mit der bewegung der menschlichen Zungen?"

[17] ibid., pp. 8-9: "Sie ist anders nichts als eben dieses/ und kan auch nichts anders seyn/ denn wenn Sie etwas anders ware/ wurde sie eben so unverstandlich/ eitel und stumm seyn/ als alle andere Sprachen und Schrifften/ keine ausgenommen. . . ."

[18] Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, IV:1946. The belief that words are powerful instruments of creation and destruction predates Aristotle and Plato and appears to have been ancient and widespread. For example, in the "Memphite Theology," dating from 700 BCE and written on a stone presently in the British Museum, the God Ptah is said to have "transmitted power through this (activity of the) tongue" (Frankfort, Wilson, and Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy*, p. 67). See Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*.

creation was a process that began with the thoughts in God's mind and ended with the articulation of these thoughts. He retranslated the first sentence of Genesis to read, "In the Head, Aelohim created the Heavens and the Earth," instead of the usual "In the beginning," on the seemingly plausible grounds that בראשית (*bereshit*), the meaning of which has always puzzled translators, could be amended to בראש (*berosh*), in the head. These ideas had the backing of both Jews and Christians.[19] In *De Trinitate*, for example, Augustine discusses the meaning of *logos* and says it can be translated either as *verbum* or *cogitatio*. Tertullian suggests *ratio*.[20]

Because van Helmont believed that Hebrew was the language of creation, he also considered it a "natural" language in which words indicated the essential natures of the things they both produced and represented. To substantiate this van Helmont, like many other authors, referred to Adam's naming of the animals. He did not believe the animals existed apart from Adam until he named them; before that time they were simply ideas in Adam's mind: "for all Things were placed within him." The act of giving names to these ideas brought the animals into physical existence, "because to call Things by their Names, is to give them their Nature."[21] The magical implications of this concept of language are obvious and although van Helmont tried to limit the verbal power of creation to God and Adam, he was not entirely successful for reasons discussed below.

Although convinced that Hebrew had originally been natural and divine, van Helmont thought this no longer true of contemporary Hebrew because the Jews had forgotten the secret wisdom inherent in their natural alphabet. His goal to was revive this knowledge by carefully considering the significance of the shapes and resulting sounds of Hebrew letters. He believed his analysis provided a key to unlock the original meaning of Hebrew words.[22] A passage in van Helmont's last book *Thoughts on Genesis* (1697), published a year before his death, provides a good example of the use to which he put his natural alphabet. In this passage he discusses the Hebrew name for God, אלוהים, "Aelohim" (his spelling). He was convinced that the sounds and shapes of the individual letters, when correctly understood, contributed qualities and characteristics which perfectly describe God. For example, the first letter *aleph* signifies (both by its shape and sound) infiniteness or multitude; the second letter *lamed* (because it is a tall letter) signifies virtue and power; *he* (undoubtedly because it is a spirant) signifies respiration, breath, life, vegetation, growth and fruitfulness; and *mem* (because of

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[19] A close approximation of Helmont's "in the Head" can be found in the Jerusalem Targum where *bereshit* is translated "in the wisdom." In Psalm CXI, 10 the word *resit* and *hokmah* (wisdom) are juxtaposed in such a way that it is possible to regard "beginning" as equivalent to "wisdom." Van Helmont would have found "head" mentioned in the Zohar, "Bereshit""(Gen. i, i-vi, 8).

[20] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, xv, xvi; see also Augustine *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus*, I, 8; Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, bk viii.

[21] Van Helmont, *Some Premeditate Thoughts upon. . . Genesis* (hereafter Genesis), p. 134.

[22] ibid., p. 9.

its closed shape) signifies a womb, hence birth and multiplicity. Thus when all the letters and vowels are taken together they exactly define God:

> At present we will search out the meaning of the word *Aelohim*. . . . *El* imports Vertue or Strength for א (as hath been said) signifies *Infiniteness* or *Multitude*. ל or *L*, is a Letter form'd with a topping Eminence in Writing, and in pronouncing is framed by an Elevation of the Tongue, and therefore signifies high Vertue or Power, and accordingly is the common Termination of the Names of Angels, as *Michael, Gabriel,* etc. O ו is the highest Sound, and therefore *Cholem* is placed on the tip of the Letter. As for ה *He,* it is, and denotes *Respiration, Breath, Life, Vegetation* or *Growth, Fruitfulness,* the *Air* and *Heavenly Influence,* and therefore was vouchsafed to *Abram* and his Wife *Sarai*. . . so that from thenceforth he was no more to be called *Abram*, but *Abraham*; and she no longer *Sarai*, but *Sarah*; and according to what is there added, this Change was to signifie to him, that God had *appointed him to be the Father of many Nations.* Whence it appears, that *O, H* hold forth to us a sublime exalted *Life, Fruitfulness* and *Vegetation* or *Growth*: But as far as *I,* the same hath a Sharp or Shrill Sound, and signifies the strong Life, that produceth the manly Member; while on the other hand, *M* denotes a *Mother,* the *Womb,* and the multiplicity of Births: for by its comprest and stifled Sound, from a shut Mouth (as appears in the pronouncing of this Letter) the Conception of Births is plainly represented to us: From all which we understand, that *Aelohim* is the Creator, who by his most exalted Infinitely diffused, Vital, Vegetant, and Generating Vertue, conceived all things from eternal Seeds, hidden in himself, and at length produced and sent forth the same out of himself, with multiplicity and distinction.[23]

Van Helmont describes each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in terms of its shape and sound and the significance these aspects have for the intrinsic meaning of the letter. He was certain that once people really understood the letters in this way, they would gain a "living" understanding of the Scriptures and religious peace and unity would swiftly follow.

There is another important aspect of van Helmont's theory of a natural language with further magical implications. The power to create did not reside simply in Hebrew words *per se*. They would have been powerless unless linked to what he describes as an "inward power" emanating from God. Van Helmont explains this in connection with the creation of light:

> no sooner had God said, Let there be Light but Light was; that is, Aelohim conceiving the Light in Thought, by a Powerful Word of the Mind, and constituting to himself an Object of Thinking, into what he might send forth his inward, Power, in so doing, I say, he outed or produced the same, and gave Existence to something separate from himself. . . .[24]

This inward power was not restricted to God—man shares it; but to protect himself against charges of magic and heresy van Helmont quickly adds that men have lost most of this power through the Fall. Had it not been for the Fall, men would have propagated themselves by thought and speech, not as

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[23] *Genesis,* pp. 13-15.
[24] ibid., pp. 34-5.

they do now in a manner fit only for those "coated with (a) gross earthly shell."[25]

Van Helmont discusses this "inward power" in detail. It is a spiritual force radiating from every individual and formed from a combination of the *spiritus* inhaled from the air and the *spiritus* contained in the semen.[26] Van Helmont accepted the common view that air contains a spiritual force. He calls this a "noble essence" or "living spirit."[27] His father had called this same spirit the "Magnall, or sheath of the air,"[28] borrowing Paracelsus' term, which was itself a variation on the Neoplatonic *anima mundi* and the Platonic and Stoic idea of the *pneuma*.[29] To demonstrate the existence of this spirit, van Helmont performed the Torricellian experiment of inverting a tube filled with mercury into a dish containing mercury. As one would expect a partial vacuum appeared at the top of the tube. When van Helmont tilted the tube, however, it entirely filled with mercury. Convinced that a vacuum could not exist in nature, the experiment proved to van Helmont that a subtle, non-material, but extended essence existed in the air, which was distinct from the "grosser" part of the air and filled the space at the top of the upright tube. This subtle essence had to be extended but could not be material because then the mercury would not have been able to take its place. Van Helmont concluded that this spirit existed throughout the world, providing the force regulating and moving material objects:

> as often as one repeats the experiment, one cannot see what place it (the subtle essence) fills. From this one can easily accept that God has planted a sympathetic, spiritual essence in the air which can easily regulate and move all the heaviest bodies.[30]

In rejecting the possibility of a vacuum in nature van Helmont was in the good company of most philosophers and scientists, including Descartes, who also performed the Torricellian experiment, denied the possibility of a vacuum, and postulated the existence of a fine dust which fills the interstices between larger corpuscles. The rejection of a vacuum was a basic aspect of

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[25] *Genesis*.

[26] Walker, "Francis Bacon and *Spiritus*."

[27] In *Kurtzer Entwurff* he calls it an "edeles wesen" (p. 73), "das *spirituose* subtile wesen" (p. 37) and a "alebendiger Geist" (p. 63).

[28] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike or, Physick Refined* . . ., p. 80: "there dwells a certain *universal or mundane spirit* in the whole world, (i.e) in all things within Trismegistus Circle, which we christen the *Magnum Magnale*, which existeth the universal *Pander* of all *sympathy and dypathy*, the invisible *Mercury* or common *Intelligencer*, and the *Promoter* of all natural actions."

[29] For the association of the *pneuma* with both breath and semen (the *penuma hagion*, or divine semen brooding over the waters) see Leisegang, *La Gnose*, pp. 34ff. ; Onians, *Origins of European Thought*, p. 115; Eliade, "Spirit, Light and Seed." Sixteenth and seventeenth century Paracelsians described this vital element in the air as a natural fire essential for life and combustion. See Debus, "The Paracelsian Aerial Niter."

[30] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 74-5: "man nict siehet/ wo es selber Platz behält; und dieses so oft man diesache wiederholt. Daraus man denn leichtlich abnehmen kan, was vor ein herzliches, geistliches Wesen Gott in die Lufft gepflanzet/ dass alle so schwere Körper so leichlich regieren un bewegen kan."

Aristotelian philosophy and therefore the accepted teaching of the Catholic Church.[31]

Van Helmont describes the process by which the noble essence in the air is drawn in by all parts of the body, particularly by the lungs, from where it passes through holes in the abdomen and circulates through every limb and organ before it is exhaled. In the course of its passage through the body this spirit absorbs the living force of an individual, including his reproductive power.[32]

Van Helmont subscribed to the normal Renaissance medical theory that sexual ejaculation and speech involved the emission of *spiritus*; and he shared the view that if semen was not physically emitted, it would be transmuted into a spiritual force that preserved its reproductive capacity and vivified the breath emitted in speech:

> I will give nothing else to be understood than that the aforementioned matter [semen], which contains within itself the essence of the human being, if it is not disseminated bodily, but is consumed and dispersed in a spiritual force, must take its reproductive power with it undivided.[33]

The association of speech and procreation is ancient and widespread. This explains why, for example, in pictures of the Annunciation the Holy Spirit is often depicted as a beam of light directed at Mary's ear.[34] As George Steiner has said, "Eros and language mesh at every point. Intercourse and discourse, copula and copulation. . . . Sex is a profoundly semantic act. . . . Ejaculation is at once a physiological and a linguistic concept."[35] It is not speech alone, however, that was connected with sex; thought was as well. Because William Harvey could find no traces of semen in the female deer he dissected (a problem with deer, apparently), he concluded that they "conceived" in much the same way thoughts are conceived in the brain. Just as in English the verb "to conceive" can be taken in both a physical and a mental sense, so too does the verb "to know" in Hebrew (ידע) signify both thinking and copulation. The association between thought and procreation and, more specifically, the connection drawn between the brain and the genitals had the

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[31] Descartes to Mersenne, 15 April 1630 (*Correspondence du P. Marin Mersenne*, II: 426). Leibniz also denied the existence of a vacuum (*The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Fifth Paper, paragraphs 34 & 35, pp. 64-6. Cf. Waard, *L'experience barometrique*; Middelton, *The History of the Barometer*; Schmitt, "Experimental Evidence for and a Void: the Sixteenth-century Arguments."

[32] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 36-9. According to Pagel the belief that the lungs were perforated "was a standing piece of contemporary information." William Harvey believed it, as did J. B. Van Helmont. Once again, van Helmont erred in good company (Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas*, p. 229).

[33] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 56-7: "Ich will anders nicht zuverstehen geben/ als dass die mehrberühmte materia [the semen] da dess Menschen wesen inne steckt/ wenn dieselbe nicht lieblich ausgesäet/ sondern zu einer geistlichen krafft zertheilet und verzehret wird/seine Menschenkrafft als denn unzertheilbar allenthalben hin mit sich führen muss."

[34] "Glad us maiden, mother mild/ Through thine ear thou were with child/ Gabriel he said it thee" (from the thirteenth century; quoted in Warner, *Mary*, p. 37). Jones, "The Madonna's Conception through the Ear."

[35] Steiner, *After Babel*, pp. 37-8.

backing of thousands of years of medical theory. In the *Timaeus* (90e-91d), Plato remarks that semen is produced in the brain and descends to the penis via the spinal cord. This idea became commonplace in the Middle Ages among both Christians and Jews. The Zohar contains explicit descriptions of the physiological process through which the semen flows from the brain, through the body, and into the female.[36] Leonardo da Vinci illustrated the supposed canals through which the semen was transmitted from the brain to the testicles.[37] The great sixteenth century surgeon Ambrose Paré accepted this idea, asserting that "a great portion of semen cometh from the brain." This belief continued into the nineteenth century, providing the rational for the masturbatory theory of insanity. Van Helmont was therefore in no way unusual in associating sex, thought, and speech.[38] These commonplace associations accounted in his mind for the difference between the voice of an adult male and that of boys or eunuchs. Here we come upon an original example given by van Helmont to show that the Hebrew language exactly mirrors reality. Only adults, he says, can pronounce the Hebrew letter *resh* ("r") because this letter expresses the ability to procreate. Thus if one compels a young boy or eunuch to make the sound, "so wird er blass und offt wohl krank" (he will become pale and often even ill).[39] One wonders how van Helmont would have explained the common inability to pronounce "r"!

Van Helmont offers another argument to prove that the voice shares the reproductive capacity. He says that in order to speak "a gently-flowing, sweet-tasting, white, slimy moisture"[40] is necessary. He identifies this with semen: "It is enough that one sees how the voice depends on the nature of our reproductive capacity, and how it attains its human and living power only from this capacity."[41] For this reason van Helmont considers man's words like his children, "offspring," who are alive, vital and full of *spiritus*. Words are consequently powerful forces and men are accountable for each one they utter:

> for as much as the voice and word of man are his off-spring and children, viz., his out-flown spirits and Angels which continually (from the beginning of his life until death) go out from him, and make up the whole man; must not man give an account of his words, which do follow him, as well as his acts or thought?[42]

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[36] Tishby, *The Wisdom of the* Zohar, I: 300, 306, n. 153. Cf. Zohar I, 162a-162b; II, 128b-129a; III, 247a-247b, 296a-296b (*Idra Zuta*). On the diffusion of this idea in medieval and early modern Judaism, see Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, ch. 5.

[37] O'Malley, et al, eds., *Leonardo da Vinci on the Human Body*, pp. 460-2.

[38] For an amusing discussion of these theories and their persistence in the eighteenth century, see Ormsby-Lennon, "Swift's Spirit Reconjured: Das Dong-An-Sich." For the universality of these ideas, see Héritier-Augé, "Semen and Blood: Some Ancient Theories Concerning Their Genesis and Relationship."

[39] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 51.

[40] ibid., p. 53.

[41] ibid., p. 56: "Genug daß man siehet/ wie die Stimme von der Ntur unserer fortpflanzung dependire/ und daraus ihre menschliche Lebens-krafft erlangen müsse."

[42] Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, pp. 63-4.

The questioner in van Helmont's dialogue has been convinced. "I conclude," he says, "that the voice of men if it is perfected is a happy, living, penetrating essence."[43]

In a curious book published long after van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*, Johann Conrad Amman, a Swiss doctor practicing in Haarlem, discusses the voice in almost identical terms. Although Amman denied any knowledge of van Helmont's ideas before he had published his own book, what he wrote was so similar that van Helmont was delighted by the work and had it translated into English and published in London.[44]

Like van Helmont, Amman was interested in teaching the deaf to speak. He employed the same method, using figures that showed the movements of the mouth organs in pronouncing the different letters. Amman's approach seems more straightforward, however—for instance the figures he proposes to help a deaf man see how the tongue moves are not related to any specific language—but on closer inspection one sees that he shares van Helmont's mystical, even magical, thoughts about the voice:

> There is nothing which floweth forth from us, which carrieth with it a more vivid character of the Life, than our Voice doth. . . . Yea, so full is the voice of Life, which immediately flows from the Heart, that to talk long, extremely wearieth us; but especially the sick, who oftentimes can scarce utter three or four words, but they faint away. Therefore, to comprehend much in a few words the Voice is an Emanation from that very Spirit which God breathed into man's Nostrils, when he created him a living soul. Hence, also, the Word of God, the Son of God, the Omnipotence of God, etc. are in Holy Scripture oftentimes homonymous, or of the like and same import.[45]

Van Helmont also attributed physical weakness to the loss of the "life force" contained in the voice. As he says, too much crying in childbirth causes a loss of the breath, or "life force," and consequently results in great weakness. On the other hand, by holding one's breath, one can gain great strength. He gives the chilling example of the rack to prove his point—an example that must have been constantly in his thoughts given the situation in which he began thinking about his *Alphabet of Nature*:

> When a person wishes to show strength or power in his arms and legs, he must hold his breath or he cannot perform such feats. On the contrary, if a person screams a lot and lets out a lot of breath, he becomes feeble in all his limbs as one can see in the case of a person who has been racked: if he has screamed too much, he becomes so enfeebled that he must confess all.[46]

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[43] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 76-77: "so schliesse ich. . . daß diese Stimme dess Menschen/ wenn sie vollkommen ist/ ein herzliches/ lebendiges durchdringendes wesen sey."

[44] J.C. Amman, *The Talking Deaf Man: Or, a Method Proposed whereby he who is born deaf, may learn to Speak.*

[45] ibid., p. 5.

[46] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 42-43: "diewell ein Mensch/ wenn er mit seinen Armen und Beinen einige starcke oder krafft will darthun/ denn Athem bey sich behalten muss/ sonst kan er solches nicht verrichten/ denn im gegentheil/ wenn der Mensch sehr schreiet/ und viel Athem von sich lasset/ so wird er matt an allen seinen Gliedern/ wie an einem Gefolterten zu sehen/ welcher/ wenn er sehr schreyet/ so enkrafftet wird/ dass er alles bekennen muss. . . . "

Amman's book helps to explain why van Helmont considers words the "offspring" and "children" of an individual. The biblical parallel Amman drew between the "son" of God and the "Word" of God was both ancient and highly suggestive. It played an important part in stimulating the belief that words are powerful, creative forces, entities in their own right with the power for good and bad.

For van Helmont, then, the breath is a vital force that contains the life of an individual. In his view every single thing in the universe, organic and inorganic, constantly gives off radiations of vital energy and in this sense "breathes":

> not only the idea proceeding from a person, either through the shell of the voice or through his whole emanation, but. . . also the ideas emanating from stones and other similar things have a powerful influence on the life which receives and takes them in.[47]

If words are impressed onto this natural force it can be turned to specific ends connected with the meaning of the words. All speech is forceful, but Hebrew, as the one language in which words exactly correspond to things, is the most powerful and creative of all.

The *Alphabet of Nature* was a comparatively late entrant into the acrimonious debate about the Scriptures which gathered momentum during the Renaissance, erupting in full force in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The increase in the number of scholars equipped with the three Holy languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) and skilled in textual criticism highlighted the discrepancies between biblical texts and brought to the fore the problems of translation and interpretation.[48] The growth of biblical scholarship created a dilemma for both Protestants and Catholics. The rallying cry of the Protestants had been for a return to the original texts; but as the study of these texts revealed more and more problems, discrepancies, and ambiguities, the Protestants were at a loss for an ultimate authority. They had rejected the Pope and turned away from the Schoolmen, setting their faith on the Hebrew originals. If these were found wanting, on what were they to base their doctrine? The Catholics were more fortunate, but only apparently so. They could rely on their Popes, councils, and patristic tradition to guide them safely through the shoals of biblical exegesis; but these were

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[47] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 58: "nicht nur die Ideen, so von einem Menschen/ entweder durch den schall der Stimme/ oder durch seine gantze ausstralung herruhren/ sondern auch die von steinen und andern dergleichen dingen entstehen/ eine gewaltige Krafft haben in dem Leben von dem sie empfangen und aufgenommen werden."

[48] Textual criticism did not begin with the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages it was well known that Jerome's Vulgate contained many errors and needed revision. However, the tools of textual criticism were very much refined during the Renaissance. Reuchlin opened up the study of Hebrew with his publication of *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* in 1506, and after 1500 Greek became more widely studied. See W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation;* Bentley, *Humanists and the Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance*; Katz, "Isaac Vossius and the English Biblical Critics 1670-1689"; Force, "Biblical Interpretation, Newton and English Deism"; Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution.*

themselves based on the unsure foundation of Jerome's admittedly imperfect Vulgate.

The controversy over the "corrupt text" became a favorite theme in the debate between Protestants and Catholics during and after the Reformation. The Catholics tried to discredit the Hebrew versions in an effort to unsettle the Protestants, while the Protestants were anxious to defend Hebrew at the expense of Latin and Greek. Van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* came out of this controversy in which scholarship often became highly charged with emotion. He was convinced that his discovery of the "natural alphabet" would put an end to controversy among Christians and even bring the Jews within the Christian community. For once everyone understood the meaning of the Hebrew letters according to his natural alphabet there would no reason to debate the meaning and significance of Hebrew words.

In stating his case van Helmont tried to steer a middle course between Protestants and Catholics. He leaned towards the Protestants with his belief that the scriptural texts available in his own day were essentially those Moses and the Prophets had handed down from God to the Jews. However, he accepted the Catholic contention that differences and errors, attributable to scribal omissions and embellishments, had crept in; and although he was convinced these were minor, they had nonetheless distorted the true character of the Hebrew language.[49]

Van Helmont accepted Capellus' conclusion that the Jews had two sorts of writing in ancient times, the Mosaic script, brought into Canaan by Abraham, taken to Egypt by Jacob, and used by Moses, and the Canaanite script, which the Jews had borrowed from the Canaanites after their flight from Egypt.[50] Unlike Capellus, however, van Helmont did not think the Jews had eventually discarded the divine Mosaic script in favor of the conventional Canaanite one. Drawing a parallel between modern habits and ancient practice, he says that the Jews have always been good at adapting to circumstances, but not at the expense of their birthright.[51] When Ezra made a new copy of the Scriptures after the Babylonian captivity, van Helmont believed he used the Mosaic script, leaving the profane Canaanite script for the Samaritans.[52] Thus the texts of the Scriptures known in the seventeenth century were in the Mosaic script, which had only been slightly corrupted.

Having established to his satisfaction that the Hebrew letters had only suffered slight corruption and could be corrected, van Helmont turned his attention to the vowel points and accents. The Hebrew language was, and still is, generally written with consonants alone, the reader interpolating the

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[49] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, pp. 24-25.

[50] On these issues, see Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* and the sources cited in n. 48

[51] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 21.

[52] ibid., p. 33. The discovery of the Samaritan Pentateuch produced considerable controversy because, although it was not an independent version of the biblical text, it was written in a different script and differed from the Masoretic text in some 6,000 places, most of which were unimportant, others pleonastic.

vowels for himself. A diacritical system does exist in which the vowels are indicated by various points and symbols below and above the letters and a series of accents indicate syntax, but most Hebrew manuscripts of the Scriptures as well as other texts generally do not include these. Their conspicuous absence led people to question both their antiquity and reliability. Because the vowels are often decisive factors in determining exact meanings, their dubious historical provenance cast suspicion on the reliability of the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole, a consequence Catholics were eager to point out. Van Helmont had to prove that the vowel points and accents were natural elements of Hebrew, and not corrupt additions, in order to substantiate his contention that the Hebrew language had not been altered and distorted beyond repair. He was able to do this by accepting the conclusions reached by Elias Levita a century before in his brilliant and controversial *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth* (1538). While Levita concluded that the vowel points were relatively modern inventions, he argues that they are in no way arbitrary but accord perfectly with the nature of the Hebrew language. Van Helmont accepted Levita's conclusions. [53] Like the letters, the vowel points are natural because their written form corresponds to the movements made by the mouth and breath in pronouncing them.[54]

As for the accents, van Helmont again accepted Levita's conclusion and freely admits they are "an entirely new invention and were not in use among the ancients."[55] He proposes numerous reasons showing why they could not possibly have been part of the Hebrew language from its inception.[56] Nonetheless, he is convinced that, like the vowels, the accents are simply modern expressions of eternal aspects of Hebrew. Those who invented the accents, he says, based them on traditions handed down since the time of Moses; therefore no one could question their legitimacy.[57]

Thus, despite its many vicissitudes, Hebrew had remained close to its original form. Even so the errors which had crept in had masked the divine secret of this natural writing—a secret which had remained buried in oblivion up to van Helmont's time. Even the Jews had lost the secret, for "their very own Talmud cannot give them even the smallest satisfaction in matters concerning the letters of the alphabet."[58] According to van Helmont the Jews themselves realized this. He quotes a passage in which Rabbi Abraham de Balmis laments the ignorance of the Jewish people and calls on God to reveal once again the secrets of the holy Hebrew alphabet:

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[53] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 134: "Sondern ich habe in diesem Stuck keinen andern Zweck/ als zue weisen/ dass die jenigen/ so solche Figuren erdacht/ es sey nun gewesen zu welcher Zeit es wolle/ nicht so gar weit von der Natur der Vocalen abgeschritten."

[54] ibid., p. 136.

[55] ibid., p. 157: ". . . ein ganz neuerfundenas Wesen sey/ und bey den Alten niemalen im brauch gewesen."

[56] ibid., pp. 157-161.

[57] ibid., pp. 164-166.

[58] ibid., p. 9: ". . . es konne ibnen ihr Talmud selbst/ wenn darinnen von den Buchstaben gehandelt wird/ zum geringsten keine satisfaction geben."

> May God in his goodness and mercy hasten our redemption, make us alive again and give us an expanded heart to master once again the secrets of the letters, points and accents of the hold Scriptures.[59]

Van Helmont believed that his natural alphabet answered Balmis's plea. He considered it the *Ursprache* spoken by God, Adam, and all men before the building of the tower of Babel. With his mirror and calipers van Helmont thought he had corrected Hebrew and purged it of any corruptions. Only by understanding the language in which the Scriptures were written could men gain a "living understanding" of the great mysteries and profound knowledge which they contain.[60]

Van Helmont's high opinion of the universal virtues of Hebrew was shared by von Rosenroth, who wrote a preface to van Helmont's book in which he explains with force and clarity all the benefits mankind will reap from the natural Hebrew alphabet. He proposes that a Society be established for the study of Hebrew according to van Helmont's theories.[61] Although he modestly says he lacks the necessary words and becomes dumb at the prospect of describing the excellence and usefulness of the Hebrew language,[62] he manages to do so eloquently for twenty or more pages. Knorr raises several interesting points that clarify van Helmont's ideas and indicate how valuable they both thought the study of Hebrew was for human life and society.

To stimulate the reader's interest in Hebrew, von Rosenroth offers the common argument that as the very first language it was the one God chose to reveal knowledge about himself and his creation. All other philosophies took their origin from the wisdom in the Scriptures: Egyptians, Indians, Greeks, and Romans were merely interlopers at the festive board, gleaners of the crumbs left by the Hebrew prophets:

> if what Iamblichus says of Pythagoras is true that he learned his wisdom from the Prophets, among whose successors was one with the name of Moschus from Phoenicia; if it is also true that the old intelligent Jews regarded it as a dishonor to take any piece of philosophical wisdom from another race. . . ; if, further, it is also true that the Platonic philosophy for the most part agrees with the Pythagorean and that wise man Numenius testifies that it was learned from the Jews: it follows that those people do not judge well who suppose and allege that the Jews have accepted many opinions from Plato, because one must conclude much more the contrary.[63]

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[59] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 11: "Es wolle aber der allmachtige Gott um sciner Gutigkeit und barmherzigkeit willen/ unsere Erlosung beschleunigen/ uns wieder lebenig machen/ un ein erweitertes Herze geben/ die Geheimnusse der Bushstaben/ Puncten und Accenten der Heiligen Schrifft wieder zuerlernen. . . . "

[60] ibid., pp. 152-156.

[61] ibid., preface, p. 7.

[62] ibid., preface, p. 8.

[63] ibid., pp. 22-23: "Denn wenn es wahr was Jamblichus von Pythagora saget/ dass er seine Weisheit von den Propheten gelernet/ welche Nachfolger gewesen eines mit Namen Moschus aus Phoenicien; wenn es auch wahr/ dass die alten verstandigen Juden es für eine schande geachtet/einig stuck der Philosophischen Weisheit von einem andern Volcke anzunehmen. . . wenn es auch ferner wahr/ dass die Platonische Philosophi mit der Pythagorischen mehrentheils unbereinkommt/ und dieser weise Mann/ wie Numenius bezueget/ sie auch von den Juden

The chronological theory commonly accepted at the time placed Moses first with Pythagoras, Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus (and all the other sages supposedly responsible for the various forms of *prisca theologia*) as his successors. It was a useful chronology because it allowed Christians to integrate pagan philosophy within a Christian framework by claiming that all philosophy ultimately derived from and reflected, however partially or inaccurately, the divine revelation originally granted to Moses.[64]

The belief that the Bible was the font of all wisdom implies that there is no such thing as progress, except in the relative sense of rediscovery. As Lovejoy and Boas pointed out, praising the past is an implicit criticism of the present, and in this sense reflects "the discontent of the civilized with civilization."[65] Like many of their contemporaries, Knorr and van Helmont were clearly critical of many aspects of contemporary society. They especially deplored the divisive religious conflicts consequent to the Reformation. But they were not pessimists. They believed it was possible to restore the bliss of the Garden of Eden. It was thus in terms of their vision of past times that they formulated their expectations of a utopian future.[66] They were convinced that if approached with a pure heart, sound mind, and the natural alphabet, the Scriptures would reveal answers to every single question exercising the human mind about God and the universe. In their view the Scriptures provided human beings with a pattern for every aspect of human life, down to politics and economics:

> If we examine the writings of the Old Testament, what do we find in them but a gold mine of all good arts and knowledge and a treasure chest in which all the gems of philosophy, all the riches of the Divine Law, and, what is most excellent, all the treasures of Divine and Holy wisdom hidden? I will not stop to consider that from this source the light of all chronology radiates, that in it one finds before his eyes a mirror of all virtues and vices, and that the true art of politics and skill in economics cannot be learned better and more thoroughly from any other book than this. Much less am I able to point out what secrets

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gelernet: So folget/ dass die jenigen nicht wol urtheilen/ welche vermeinen un vorgeben/ die Juden haben viel meinungen von Platone angenommen; weil man vielmehr das gegentheil schliessen muss. . . . "

[64] See Walker, "The *Prisca theologia* in France," and his book *The Ancient Theology*. But it should be pointed out that for some Renaissance and early modern thinkers, notably Giordano Bruno and Athanasius Kircher, the original *prisca theologia* came from the Egyptians, from whom Moses learned the secret wisdom he then passed on to the Jews. See Yates, *GBHT*; de León-Jones, *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah*; Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition*. Freud continued this tradition in *Moses and Monotheism*.

[65] Lovejoy and Boas, *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas in Classical Antiquity*, p. 7.

[66] This attitude towards the past was particularly strong during the Renaissance. Poets and humanists in Italy and France borrowed from Virgil's Fourth Eclogue and spoke in terms of the return of the golden age. This was obviously a convenient form of flattery for patrons such as the Medici, but it also reflected the widespread view that men actually were experiencing a "renaissance" or rebirth. See Yates, *GBHT* p. 1; Gombrich, "Renaissance and Golden Age," in *Norm and Form*; Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*. Even in the seventeenth century Francis Bacon described his program for the advancement of learning as "Instauratio."

> both of Nature and custom this miraculous book keeps concealed under the simple historical letter, not to mention the secret prophecies.[67]

Van Helmont's natural alphabet provides the "key" to the treasure-house of the Scriptures:

> Is there no key to be found with which the Mysteries of Scripture might be opened? And for as much as the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and that it cannot be translated into another language so as to retain its own proper force and energy, may not we therefore suppose that in the Hebrew language (as we consider the same to be a living language) this key is to be found?[68]

With van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* in mind, Knorr asks rhetorically, "If someone not only learned to understand the will and the secrets of God more exactly and better but could also give others the opportunity to succeed in this, would such a one not produce great benefits?"[69] He answers his own question: the benefits would be tremendous. All the disparate translations of the Old Testament could be set aside, thus eliminating a principle cause of religious dissension.[70] The application of the natural alphabet to the New Testament would prove equally significant, since the Greek of the New Testament was firmly rooted in Hebrew and could not be understood without a thorough knowledge of it.[71] The application of the natural alphabet to the texts of the Scriptures would produce one irrefutable interpretation of their meaning. Catholic and Protestant would be brought together in truth and mutual understanding; even the Jews would agree to join this single, ecumenical Church. Christ would prevail by means of the natural alphabet: "that which so many thousands of Christians have wished and groaned for, for such a long time,"[72] namely religious peace and unity, would, according to Knorr, follow upon the work of his proposed society. Such were the visions inspired by van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*.

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[67] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, preface, p. 12: ". . . wenn wir de Schrifften des Alten Testaments ansehen/ was finden wir darinnen anders eine Goldgrube aller guten Kunste un Wissenschafften/ und einen Schatzkasten/ darinnen alle Kleinodien der Philosophi, alle Riechthumer des Rechtens/ und was das vornehmste/ alle Schatze der Gottlichen und allein seligmachenden Weisheit verborgen liegen? Ich will nicht gedencken/ dass daraus das eiuige Liecht aller Zeitrechnung hervorstralet/ dass darinnen jederman ein vollkommer Spiegel aller Tugenden und Laster vor augen stehet/ und die warhafftigen Regein wohl zu regieren und kluglich hauszuhalten/ aus keinem Buch besser und grundlicher zu lernen sind/ als aus diesem. Viel weniger kan ich ausfuhren/ was diese wunderbaren Bucher unter dem enfaltigen historischen Buchstaben vor herzliche Geheimnisse beydes der Natur und der Sitten verstecket halten/ der geheimen Weissagungen zu geschweigen."

[68] Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 67.

[69] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, preface, pp. 18-19: "Wenn nun jemand den Willen und die Geheimnisse Gottes nicht nur selbst genauer und besser wurde verstehen lernen/ sondern auch andern gelegenheit geben konte/ hierzu zu gelangen/ wurde der nicht herzlichen Nutzen schaffen?"

[70] ibid., preface, p. 18.

[71] ibid., preface, pp. 20-21.

[72] ibid., preface, p. 29: "das jenige. . . wonach so viel tausend Christen eine so lange zeit gewunschet und geseufftzet haben. . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SOURCES OF VAN HELMONT'S *ALPHABET OF NATURE*

When we turn to the sources of van Helmont's theory of Hebrew as a natural and divine language, we are brought as in so many cases back to Plato and Aristotle, who presented, or were thought to present, two diametrically opposed views about language that became a subject of controversy around the time van Helmont wrote his *Alphabet of Nature.* In the *De Interpretatione* Aristotle took the view that language was based on convention:

> We have already said that a noun signifies this or that by convention. No sound is by nature a noun: it becomes one by becoming a symbol. Inarticulate noises mean something, for instance, those made by brute beasts. But no noises of that kind are nouns.

In the *Cratylus*, Plato (through Socrates) begins by considering the idea that there might be a natural language in which the shapes and sounds of letters indicated the essential nature of things. He proceeds to show, however, that such a language could not exist. First, if it did, words would be indistinguishable from things; and second, there are too many concepts which cannot be related to language, for example, numbers. Although Socrates dismisses the idea of a natural language, he does not ignore the possibility that a rational language could be constructed in which compound words would be built up from conventionally defined roots in such a way that anyone who saw a word would be able to resolve it into its elements and grasp its meaning. But because compound words are not always explicable in terms of their roots, Socrates' final conclusion is to beware of words and the effect their misuse can have upon thought.

In the following centuries many people forgot Socrates' conclusion and overlooked Plato's dismissal of language as deceptive and "unserious" in the *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter* (342bff.). What impressed them most was the suggestion that a language that mirrored nature would be most perfect. They isolated statements in the *Cratylus*, the *Republic*, the *Laws,* and other Platonic dialogues to the effect that sounds and symbols can in some measure indicate things, stimulate moods, or inspire ideas and applied them more specifically than Plato ever had. The Neoplatonists Plotinus and Iamblichus, for instance, accepted the idea that there were such things as divine languages in which words expressed the essence of things.[1] The Hermetic dialogues maintained that Egyptian was superior to Greek because it was patterned after reality and offered insights into divine truths.[2] Philo of

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[1] Iamblichus, *Theurgis, or the Egyptian Mysteries*, p. 245. Plotinus, *The Enneads* V, 8, 6, p. 427.

[2] *Hermetica,* trans. Copenhaver, p. 58.

Alexandria, a Jewish Platonist, applied this idea to the Greek Septuagint, which he considered verbally inspired:

> with Moses the names assigned are manifest images of the things, so that name and thing are inevitably the same from the first and the name and that to which the name is given differ not. . . .[3]

According to Beryl Smalley, Philo's attitude towards the language of the Scriptures became "an underlying assumption of medieval exegesis."[4] It can be found earlier in the writings of certain Church Fathers. For example, in his book against Celsus Origen discusses the power of Hebrew names, a power he claims is lost through translation.

It was generally accepted by the Church that sounds, particularly words set to music, could influence the soul. This perfectly legitimate psychological truth tended to become confused with magic both inside and outside the Church. The effects of words and sounds were not confined to the psychological realm but extended to the physical. According to Catholic theology, only when the priest says, "Hoc est enim corpus meum" and "Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis mei" does transubstantiation occur. Many Church rituals and all the sacraments involve this kind of magical linguistic practice: for example, baptism, the consecration of the bells and images, and exorcism.[5]

These ideas about the power and reality of sounds and symbols became especially prevalent in the Renaissance with the revival of Neoplatonism and the discovery and translation of the Hermetic texts[6] and the hieroglyphics of Horapollo.[7] Behind the Renaissance interest in astrology, magic, talismans, emblems, and devices was the belief that symbols were natural rather than conventional. Astrological and magical charms were thought to contain the influences of the heavens and "be" what they represented. Emblems and devices were considered expressions of deep and hidden truths.[8] Ficino, for example, thought that the hieroglyph of a winged serpent biting its tail mysteriously expressed the idea of time.[9]

The belief that symbols embody esoteric truths was the corollary of two Platonic and Neoplatonic theories: that creation was a process of emanation from an intelligible world of ideas, and that intuition was the highest form of

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[3] Quoted in Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 6.

[4] ibid., p. 8.

[5] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 151 and passim.

[6] A significant amount of Hermetic material was known before Ficino's translation of the Greek texts (Dannenfelt, "Hermetica Philosophica"). But Ficino's translation was important because it made the Hermetica respectable by incorporating Hermes in the genealogy of ancient theologians, leading up to Christ. Cf. Walker, *Ancient Theology* and Yates, *GBHT*, ch. 1.

[7] First printed in 1515 the Hieroglyphics of Horapollo went through thirty editions in the following hundred years. See Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*; David, *Le débat sur les écritures et l'hieroglyphe au XIIe et XVIIIe*; Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition*; Witkower, "Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance"; Yates *GBHT*, pp. 164ff; Dannenfelt, "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance."

[8] Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae."

[9] Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, p. 1768.

knowledge. According to Platonic theory, every material object is an imperfect reflection of the higher reality from which it emanated. The universe therefore consists of a hierarchical series of corresponding levels of creation, with every successive level mirroring the preceding one but in a less perfect form. Even the meanest object in the world could therefore be taken as a symbol of something greater, better and, in a Platonic sense, more real. For this reason a symbol was more than a conventional sign; it was a reflection of the highest order of reality, and as a reflection it contained traces of the power and force of its prototype.[10] The magical implications of this theory are obvious and were put to good use by Ficino, Agrippa, and numerous others. What is so striking about this attitude towards symbols is that it provided a metaphysical justification for what is usually described as a primitive way of thinking in which representation is confused with reality, signs for the thing signified. The confusion between an image and its object and a name and its bearer provides the rational for magic.

To Platonists the highest form of knowledge consists in the intuitive, therefore immediate, recollection of innate ideas. The equation of knowledge with intuition contributed to the high regard Platonists had for symbols. Through the intuitive understanding of a symbol men are able to grasp the whole of a truth; in a flash they understand the ideas and essences behind the world of appearances. Plotinus thought Egyptian hieroglyphs embodied this kind of intuitive knowledge:

> The wise of Egypt—whether in precise knowledge or by native intuition indicated the truth where, in their effort towards philosophical statement, they left aside the writing-forms that take in the detail of words and sentences—those characters that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning—and drew pictures instead, engraving in the temple inscriptions a separate image for every separate item: thus they exhibited the absence of discursiveness in the Intellectual Realm. For each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing.[11]

The Platonic attitude towards symbols is very much in evidence in van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* inasmuch as he thinks of Hebrew letters as hieroglyphs, whose shapes offer intuitive knowledge of their meaning.

While is it probable that van Helmont drew upon the Neoplatonists, Church Fathers, the Hermetic dialogues, and the hieroglyphs of Horapollo for his own ideas, there were many other sources closer to his own period from which he derived his natural Hebrew alphabet. A major source was the writings of Jewish Kabbalists.[12] The *Alphabet of Nature* was based on some of the treatises which were later published the *Kabbala denudata.*

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[10] Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, p. 188; E.H. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae," pp. 153ff.

[11] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V, 8, 6, p. 427. See also Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae," pp. 157ff.

[12] In his preface to *The Alphabet of Nature*, Knorr refers to Origen, Jerome, Iamblichus, Numenius, and Kircher, along with many others. In the *Kabbala denudata,* he refers to Pico, Reuchlin, Pistorius, Postel, and Rittangel, in addition to many Jewish Kabbalists and Christian and Jewish Hebraistis (Elias Levita, Capellus, Scaliger, the elder and younger Buxtorf, etc.).

The Kabbalists described the process of creation in terms of two metaphors, the emanation of divine light and the unfolding of divine speech. Gershom Scholem maintains that in general the Kabbalists preferred the speech metaphor because of the prohibition the Jews placed on figurative imagery.[13] God could not be seen but he could be heard. In the fertile minds of the Kabbalists this voice began to take on strange shapes. As Scholem says, they began to see the mystical form of God in his very names and words.[14] Even the smallest, most insignificant word in the Torah revealed something about God. This way of thinking followed its own logic until the Torah was seen as a single divine name and equated with the other mystical and mysterious name of God, the *Tetragrammaton* (יהוה). The Kabbalists believed without question that names are natural and not conventional. So deep-rooted was this conviction among Kabbalists (and non-Kabbalists) that it was deemed blasphemous to try to pronounce the *Tetragrammaton*, for if it could be pronounced, God's essence would be known.[15]

The Kabbalists took many of their ideas about language from the *Sefer Yezirah* (Book of Creation), a small book written in Palestine between the third and sixth centuries CE. The *Sefer Yezirah* was widely known and available to Christian Kabbalists through several Latin editions and commentaries.[16] The unidentified author of *Sefer Yezirah* considered the individual letters of the Hebrew alphabet to be the building blocks of the universe. He takes each letter in order and separately combines it with the other letters, obtaining 231 basic "roots" or "gates" from which he says all created things developed.[17] The most extraordinary part of the *Sefer Yezirah* is the equation made between the different letters of the alphabet and various principles in the world. The letters are divided into three groups: 1) the three "mother" letters, *aleph, mem* and *sin*; 2) the twelve "simple" letters,[18] *he, vav, zayin, chet, tet, yod, lamed, nun, samech, ayin, tsade* and *kof*; and 3) and the seven "double" letters,[19] *bet, gimel, dalet, kaf, pe, resh* and *tav*. The "mother" letters stood for the three elements, air, water and fire, or for the three

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[13] In this connection Deuteronomy 4:12 was often quoted. See Scholem, *Zur Kabbala und Ihrer Symbolik*, p. 33; *idem*, "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala."

[14] Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, p. 8.

[15] Behind this prohibition lies the ancient belief that by naming a thing one gains power over it. Pontus de Tyard, a sixteenth century French poet and Kabbalist, pointed this out. See Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 99. One of the many ways the false Messiah Sabbatai Sevi shocked his contemporaries was by pronouncing the *Tetragrammaton*. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, pp. 142-3.

[16] For the editions see Goldschmidt, *Sepher Jesira*; Scholem, "Jesira," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Kaplan's English translation (*Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory and Practice*) is not very useful for scholars because he synthesizes the text from several manuscripts and provides an ahistorical interpretation.

[17] Pistorius, *Artis Cabalisticae*, p. 870. Scholem points out that the Greek word "stoicheion" means both letter and element or atom (*The Kabbala and its Symbolism*, pp. 77ff). The Hebrew word has the similarly suggestive double meaning of either word or thing.

[18] These letters are called "simple" because they have only one sounded form.

[19] The "double" letters can have either a hard or soft sound, depending on whether they are written with a *daghes* or not. Originally *resh* was also pronounced in two different ways, as a lingual "r" or uvular "r."

principles, moderation, cold, and heat. The twelve "simple" letters stood for an extraordinary medley of senses, actions and passions: vision, hearing, smell, speech, taste, intercourse, work, walking, anger, laughter, thought and sleep. By manipulating these twelve letters and the principles they represent, God is supposed to have created the twelve signs of the Zodiac, the twelve months of the year, and the twelve main parts of the body (the hands, feet, kidneys, liver, gall bladder, spleen, colon, stomach, heart).[20] The seven remaining "double" letters stand for the principles of life, peace, knowledge, wealth, grace, fecundity and power; but because they are "double" they can also be converted into their opposites: death, war, ignorance, poverty, abomination, sterility and servitude. From these God created the stars, the days of the year (week?) and the seven "doors" of the human face. He also created the seven skies, the seven climates and the seven animals, or planets.[21] By combining and arranging these letters in speech God created the entire universe. The author of the *Sefer Yezirah* also suggests that the letters were placed on a revolving sphere, wheel, or circle and that creation occurred through the process of revolution:

> The twenty-two letters, the foundation, were arranged on a sphere with the two hundred and thirty-one gates. When the sphere was rotated forwards, it signifies good, when backwards, the opposite. He weighed *aleph* and every letter and every letter with *aleph* thus each one. Thus by rotating each with all, the two hundred and thirty-one gates were produced. And every language and every creature [comes] from these.[22]

One of the treatises given predominance in the *Kabbala denudata*, and which van Helmont therefore knew, depends heavily on the *Sefer Yezirah*. It was called the *Valley of the King* and was written by the sixteenth century Lurianic Kabbalist Napthali ben Jacob Bacharach.[23] Following the *Sefer*

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[20] Pistorius, p. 871: "Duodecim simplices . . . Fundamenta illarum, Visus, Auditus, Odoratus, Locutio, Commestio, Coitus, Opus, Ambulatio, Ira, Risus, Cogitatio, Somnus . . . Duodecim Simplices sculpsit, incidit, composuit, ponderavit & transmutavit, & creavit cum illis duodecim signa in orbe: Videlicet, Arietem, Taurum, etc. Et duodecim Menses in anno: Et hae sunt duodecim gubernatrices hominis: Videlicet, manus 1) Dextra 2) Sinistra 3) Pes 4) Uterque 5) Renes 6), 7) Jecur, 8) Fel, 9) Splen, 10) Colon, 11) Coagulum & 12) Ventriculus."

[21] ibid., p. 870: "Septem duplices . . . Syllabarum fundamenta Vita, Pax, Scienta, Divitiae, Gratia, Semen, Dominatio. Duplices quia convertuntur in opposita, loco Vitae est mors, Pacis bellum, Scientia ignorantia, Divitiarum paupertas, Gratiae abominatio, Seminis sterilitas, Dominationis servitus . . . Septem duplices sculpsit, incidit, composuit & creavit cum illis stellas in Mundo, Dies in anno & portas in hominae, & ex illis sculpsit septem Coelos, septem climata, septem animalis."

[22] ibid., p. 870: "viginti duae literae, Fundamenta, collocatae in sphaera a cum Ianuis ducentis triginta & una. Sphaera directe rotata, bonum significat. Retrograda econverso, poneravit scilicet Aleph cum omnibus, & omnia cum Aleph & sic de singulis. Ita rotando singulas per omnes, resultant Ianuae ducentae triginta & una. Et omnia Idiomata & omnis creatûra ex illis . . . ."

[23] The *Kabbala denudata* was published in three parts, the first in 1677, the second in 1678, and the third in 1684. Since the first two parts are generally bound together in one volume (as in the 1974 Olms reprint), I refer to these in the following notes as *KD* I. But since there are four distinct parts with separate pagination in this bound volume, I have tried to make it easier for the reader to find passages by referring to *KD* I, 1; *KD* I, 2; *KD* I, 3; *KD* I, 4 (followed by page numbers). I refer to the separately bound volume of 1684 as *KD* II. Von Rosenroth refers to the

Yezirah Bacharach describes the Hebrew letters as "building blocks" of the universe. Even man was created through the mystery of the letters.[24] As the microcosm which contains all things man is pictured in the shape of the *Tetragrammaton.* By a happy coincidence, if these are arranged on top of each other, the stick figure of a man emerges. Strange conclusions for an iconoclastic religion!

Bacharach brings out the theurgical implications in the *Sefer Yezirah.* He includes a recipe for making a three-year-old heifer, probably a covert reference to the making of the *golem.*[25] He is understandably reticent about the exact process, but he describes how each part of the heifer's body will be produced from a combination of one Hebrew letter with the others and with the divine *Tetragrammaton.*[26]

Bacharach was not the only person writing along these lines. His belief that tangible objects could be created by speech was shared by many others and appears in another treatise included in the *Kabbala denudata.* In *Concerning the Revolution of Souls,* Hayim Vital describes how just and pious men can create angels and spirits through prayers:

> If a just and pious man applies himself to the law and prays with attention, from these utterances going forth from his mouth, angels and sacred spirits will be created, who will always last and persist.[27]

Van Helmont had called a man's words "his out-flown spirits and Angels." Luria also makes the same invidious comparison as van Helmont between divine and human procreation:

> Superior copulation was made by kisses just as elsewhere it is declared that breath coming forth from the mouth becomes something spiritual, reaching the

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author of the *Valley of the King* as follows: "Introductio pro meliori intellectu Libri Sohar e Scripta R. Napthali Hirtz F. Jaacob Elchanan. . . (*KD* , II, 1: 152). Scholem identifies the same author as Napthali ben Jacob Bacharach in *MTJM,* p. 258.

[24] "Vallem Regiam," *KD* II, 1: 217: "Veniri non potest ad intellectum creationis hominis nisi per mysterium litterarum."

[25] Scholem, "Golem," *Encyclopaedia Judaica; idem,* "The Idea of the Golem," in *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism,* ch. 5; Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid.* In the Talmud and Midrash there is a legend of two Rabbis who made a calf for themselves every Sabbath by using the *Sefer Yezirah* and who then ate it. (San. 65b, 67v). According to Goldschmidt, in the Jerusalem Talmud there is a story of a Rabbi who boasted that with the help of the *Sefer Yezirah* he could make stags and roe-stags out of cucumbers and pumpkins (4ff.).

[26] *Vallem Regiam, KD* II, 1: 220-1.

[27] Vital, ". . . de Revolutionibus Animarum . . . ex operibus R. Jitzchak Lorjensis Germani," *KD,* II, 2: 458-9: "Quod si igitur homo justus est atque pius, studetque in lege, & precatur cum attentione; ex illis vocibus, quae prodeunt ab ore ejus, creantur Angeli & Spiritus Sancti, qui semper durant atque persistunt."

> three highest numerations. Inferior copulation, or lying together, is more bodily, whilst true drops of semen are joined.[28]

The *Valley of the King* is of interest to van Helmont and his theories in another important way. Bacharach suggests that the shapes of Hebrew letters are significant in themselves He gives the example of the letter pe (פ) and says that it resembles the figure of a penitent man who bows his head and extends his hands. It thus signifies the mystery of conversion.[29] This is the kind of observation Helmont constantly makes throughout the *Alphabet of Nature*.

A similar connection between the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and creation appears in the writings of another Kabbalist whose work was highly regarded by von Rosenroth and included, in part, in the *Kabbala denudata* under the title *The Gate of the Heavens*. [30] The author of this treatise, Abraham Cohen Herrera, claims that everything was created through combinations of Hebrew letters. He connects the letters with the creation and characteristics of the first man, or microcosm, *Adam Kadmon*, and with the ten *sefirot*, those aspects of God which he revealed through creation.[31] These mystical ideas about Hebrew obviously had as much appeal for von Rosenroth as for van Helmont because they appear scattered throughout many of the other treatises included in the *Kabbala denudata*.[32]

Van Helmont was not solely dependent on Jewish Kabbalists for these ideas about Hebrew. The Kabbala penetrated Christian circles long before van Helmont wrote his *Alphabet of Nature*. It became part of the Neo-platonic-Hermetic-kabbalistic synthesis that characterizes the thought of so many Renaissance and early modern writers, for example, Pico, Reuchlin, Agrippa, Postel, Paracelsus, and Boehme. These authors, together with the Lurianic Kabbalists, were the most immediate sources for Helmont's views. However well-versed he was in the writings of the Jewish Kabbalah, he

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[28] *De Revolutionibus Animarum*, *KD* II, 3:3 92: " . . copula superior fiat osculis, prout alibi declaratum est, quod halitus ex ore prodiens fit spirituale quid, ad tres supremas numerationes pertinens, Copula autem inferior, concubitus, magis est corporea dum gutta seminali conjuncta."

[29] *KD* II, 1: 213.

[30] Herrera wrote his book in Spanish as *Puerta del Cielo*. It was translated into Hebrew (in a somewhat different form) by Rabbi Isaac Aboab Fonseca and published in 1655. Rosenroth abbreviated the text quite considerably (and in doing so changed its meaning to some extent) in the Latin translation he included in the *Kabbala denudata* under the title "Liber שער השמיים Seu Porta Coelorum, in quo Dogmata Cabbalistice. . . Philosophicè proponuntur & cum Philosophia Platonica conferuntur. Autore R. Abraham Cohen Irira, Lusitano," *KD*, I, 3: 1-192 (separate pagination). There is a modern German translation of von Rosenroth's version: Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Das Buch שער השמיים oder Pforte des Himmels*, trans. Haussermann (Frankfurt, 1874), with an introduction by Scholem. Scholem says of von Rosenroth's translation: "Im grossen und ganzen is die Übersetzung Knorrs, wenn man die Schwierigkeit von Aboabs hebraischem Stil in Betracht zieht, erstaunlich gut" (p. 40).

[31] *KD*, I, 3: 118.

[32] For example, in one of the books from the Zohar that Rosenroth included, *The Book of Concealed Mystery*. See Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, pp. 41ff. See also "Apparatus in Librum Sohars," *KD* I, 1, passim, where the significance of each Hebrew letter is discussed.

viewed them through the eclectic eyes of his Christian predecessors.[33] While these authors were the primary sources for van Helmont, their writings had to be used carefully because both Catholics and Protestants deemed many ideas contained in them heretical, blasphemous magic.

Language and symbols played an important part in the heated debate over magic that began in the late fifteenth century. This debate, in turn, was part of the larger issue of how to distinguish the natural from the supernatural and demonic and so carve out a realm for the legitimate practice of science.[34] On one side of the debate were the Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, and Kabbalists, who considered magic a natural force in an animate universe and advocated their own brands of "good" natural magic as fully scientific.[35] On the other side were those Catholics and Protestants for whom magic was a diabolical rival to their faith. A central issue in this debate was whether words and images had magical power and, if they did, whether this power was natural or demonic and its use licit or illicit. Those in favor of natural magic generally agreed that images and words (especially divine names and the words in a holy language) were powerful forces and could be legitimately used to produce good magical effects. Their opponents either insisted their use was diabolical or denied that they had any force at all. Underlying this last argument was the assumption that language and symbols were conventional, not real, representations of things; therefore they were powerless to produce magical effects.[36]

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was one of the earliest, most famous and influential of Renaissance natural magicians to discuss the magical power of images and sounds. His ideas were accepted and embellished by innumerable later writers. Ficino developed a form of spiritual and subjective magic to attract beneficial celestial forces into the soul of the operator.[37] An essential element in Ficino's magic was his conviction that words represent the natures of things. He cites the usual sources to support this: Plato, Origen, Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus, and Iamblichus. Like so many others, Ficino accepted Plato's premise that the words in a perfect language would indicate the nature of things but ignored his conclusion that such a language could not exist:

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[33] Benz, *Die Christiche Kabbala*; Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*; Scholem, "Zur Geschichte der Anfange der Christichen Kabbala"; Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*; *idem*, *Le Zôhar chez les Kabbalistes Chétiens de la Renaissance*.

[34] Walker, *Magic*; Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century"; Peuckert, *Pansophie*.

[35] The distinction between good "natural" magic and the bad magic of the Middle Ages ("modernos") was made, for example, by Pico in his first and second magical conclusions (*Opera Omnia*, I:104). Reuchlin makes a similar distinction between good magic based on divine languages and the bad magic of the Middle Ages in *De Verbo Mirifico*, sig. c^{r-v}, $c2^{r}$ -c3r.

[36] Pedro Garsias, for example, denied the magical power of words, except as signs between a magus and demons (*Determinationes Magistrales contra Conclusiones Joannis Pici*, Rome, 1489, sig m vi^{v} -m $viii^{r}$). Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola also argued against the power of words (*J.F. Pici liber de imaginatione*. Venice, 1501. Cf. Walker, *Magic*, ch. 5.

[37] Walker, *Magic*, chs. 1-2.

> For indeed, a name, as the Platonists say, is nothing else than a certain power of the thing itself, first conceived in the mind, so to speak, then expressed by the voice and finally indicated by letters. Moreover, divine things by necessity contain divine power. For this reason Plato here and in the *Philebus* commands that the names of God be venerated since they contain a far greater power than shrines and divine statues.[38]

Ficino argued that words can become powerful forces when uttered, particularly when set to music, for song is "warm air, even breathing, and in a measure living, made up of articulated limbs, like an animal, not only bearing movement and emotion, but even signification, like a mind, so that it can be said to be, as it were a kind of aerial and rational animal."[39] The concept of song as spirit impressed with meaning and full of force has much in common with van Helmont's belief that words impressed on the breath, or spirit, can have powerful transitive effects. Although Ficino tried to confine his spiritual magic to subjective effects, there is the clear implication that the effects could be transitive, an implication Agrippa and other less circumspect magicians openly avowed.

With Ficino's younger contemporary, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), we come one step closer to van Helmont's kabbalistic theory of language, for Pico combined ideas derived from the Kabbalah with the more common Neoplatonic ones about sounds and symbols.[40] Pico applied Ficino's view of the Egyptian hieroglyphs to Hebrew and, like van Helmont, read meaning into the shapes of letters:

> There are no letters in the whole law which in their forms, conjunctions, separations, twisting, direction, defect, superabundance, smallness, greatness, crowning, shutting, opening and order . . . do not reveal secrets.[41]

Pico also thought that Hebrew letters embodied different powers and gave the same example Reuchlin and van Helmont later used of how the addition

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[38] Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, II: 1320: "Nomen enim verum, ut Platoni placet nihil aliud est, quam rei ipsius vis quaedam mente primum, ut dixi, concepta, voce deinde expressa literis demum significata. Rei autem divinae necesse est virtutem esse divinam. Quamobrem Dei nomina cum illis divina vis insit, Plato & hic, & *Philebo* venerari iubet, atque ut significat in legibus, multo etiam magis quam delubra statuasque divinas." See also Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*.

[39] Translated in Walker, *Magic*, p. 10.

[40] Van Helmont rarely mentions his sources, but it would have been odd had he not known Pico's writings. Von Rosenroth mentions Pico in a letter included in the *Kabbala denudata* I, 2:76. Since van Helmont helped to edit this work and knew the recipient of the letter, Henry More, it is more than likely he would have discussed Pico's kabbalistic ideas with his friends. Cf. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*.

[41] Pico wrote two sets of kabbalistic conclusions: "Conclusiones numero XLVII secundum doctrinam Sapientum Hebreorum Cabalistarum, quorum memoria sit semper" and "Conclusiones Cabalisticae numero LXXI secundam opinionem propriam ex ipsis Hebreorum Sapientum fundamentis Christianam Religionem maxime confirmantes." See his *Opera Omnia*, pp. 80-3, 107-13. This conclusion is number 33 of the first set: "Nullae sunt literae in tota lege, quae in formis, coniunctionibus, separtionibus, tortuositate, directione, defectu, superabundantia, minortate, maioritate, coronatione, clausura, apertura, . . . secreta non manifestent (p. 82)."

of the letter *he* to Abraham's name enabled him to procreate: "unless the letter *he* . . . had been added, Abraham would not have begot children."[42]

Like van Helmont and von Rosenroth, Pico believed that the Scriptures contained all there is to know, but like them he believed this in an essentially kabbalistic, not Christian, way. Instead of interpreting every Biblical verse according to its literal, allegorical, topological, and anagogic sense, as both Jews and Christians did, he accepted the specifically kabbalistic view of the Bible as a sum of building blocks which could be sorted and shifted to reveal divine mysteries.[43] Pico was aware of the complicated rules for manipulating and permutating Hebrew letters described in the *Sefer Yezirah* and elaborated into a system by the twelfth century Spanish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia.[44] Indeed, he uses these rules to great effect if we believe his kabbalistic conclusions, particularly the seventh one:

> No Hebrew Kabbalist can deny that the name Jesus, if we interpret it according to Kabbalist principles and methods, signifies God, the Son of God, and the wisdom of the Father through the divinity of the third person . . . .[45]

Frances Yates suggests that Pico was the first to draw a parallel between the kabbalistic practice of transposing and permutating letters and the art of Raymond Lull.[46] The Lullist art was both a memory system and a method for investigating and discovering truth.[47] Lull based his art on the divine names or attributes of God, which he seems to have identified to some extent with Platonic ideas, considering them both the causes of creation and the abstract principles informing the created world. In the most common form of his art Lull makes use of nine attributes, *Bonitas, Magnitudo, Eternitas, Gloria, Potestas, Sapientia, Voluntas, Virtus,* and *Veritas,* which he indicated with the letters B through K. He placed these letters on concentric circles which the practitioner of his art was supposed to revolve in a way that would enable him to understand any subject he wished to tackle. The similarity between Lull's art and the letter mysticism of the Kabbalah is striking. The description in the *Sefer Yezirah* of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet revolving on spheres (more probably circles) presents a very Lullist picture. The similarity between the two was so striking in fact that after the Renaissance many books were published as kabbalistic works although they

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[42] Conclusion 15, first set: "Nisi nomini Abraham litera He addita fuisset, Abraham non genera sset" (ibid., p. 81).

[43] *Heptaplus*, p. 374.

[44] ibid., pp. 374-6. Hebrew words and texts could be interpreted by employing three different techniques, *temurah* (anagrams), *gematria* (letter numerology), *and notarikon* (abbreviations). See the *Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Idel does not think Pico knew Abulafia's work itself but the work of an anonymous Kabbalist among Abulafia's students ("Ramon Lull and ecstatic Kabbalah"). On Abulafia, see Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia.*

[45] Conclusion 7, second set: "Nullus Hebraeus Cabalista potest negare, quod nomen Ieus, si eum secundum modum et principa cabalae interpretemur, hoc totum precise & nihil aliud significat, id est Deum Dei filium patrisque sapientiam per tertiam divintatis personam. . . ." (p. 108). See also conclusions 5 and 20 for kabbalistic proofs of the Trinity.

[46] Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 188. Wirszubski makes this point as well.

[47] Yates, *The Art of Memory*, ch. 8. See also, eadem, "The Art of Ramon Lull: an Approach through Lull's Theory of the Elements"; eadem, "Ramon Lull and John Scotus Erigena."

discussed Lullist techniques and used Lullist figures, attributes, and notations.[48]

A far more overtly magical interpretation of kabbalistic and Neoplatonic ideas about language appears in Ludovico Lazarelli's *Crater Hermetis*.[49] Lazarelli accepted the kabbalistic view that God created the universe by the word of his mouth, but he also believed that men possess the same divine power to create through speech. He did not temper his idea, as van Helmont did, by saying that it had been lost with the Fall. Lazarelli calls this "the new novelty of novelties, greater than all marvels," namely that "man has discovered the nature of God" and can create divine souls.[50] What is especially interesting is that Lazarelli equates this ability to make divine souls with both the making of divine souls in the *Asclepius* and the inspiration of the Apostles and implies that all these forms of inspiration are explicable in terms of the letter mysticism of the Kabbalah. Lazarelli refers to a passage supposedly in the *Sefer Yezirah* in which Abraham teaches that a wise man can create new men.[51] This may well be a reference to kabbalistic precriptions for making the *golem*.[52] If Lazarelli did have the *golem* in mind, it would support Walker's belief that Lazarelli is describing more than a spiritual rebirth, that he has in mind a magical operation by means of which a master provides his disciple with a good demon.[53]

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) is another important source for van Helmont and Knorr. Von Rosenroth refers to his work in his preface to van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature,* and although he never directly mentions him,

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[48] Yates, *The Art of Memory,* pp. 188-9.

[49] Lazarelli's book was published along with two Hermetic dialogues by Jacques Lefèvre d' Etaples in 1505: *Contenta in hoc volumine, Pimander, Mercurii Trismegisti liber se sapientia & postestate dei. Asclepius. Eiusdem Mercurii liber de voluntate divina Item. Crater Hermetis A Lazerio Setempedano.* A French translation was published in Paris, 1549 by Gabriel du Preau. For Lazarelli see Brini, "Ludovico Lazarelli, Testi Scelti"; Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino & Lodovico Lazarelli."

[50] Lazarelli, p. 40, Walker, *Magic,* p. 68.

[51] Lazarelli, p. 41[r]: "Abraham quoque in libro quo Zepher izira/idest formationis liber appelatur: docet sic novos formari homines, eundem videlicet esse in desertum montem ubi jumenta non pascant: e cuius medio adamam id est terram rubram et virgineam esse eruendam /deinceps ex ea formandum esse hominem /et per membra/ rite litterarum per membra dispositione vivificantur. Nam divina generatio: mystica verborum prolatione/ quae litterarum componuntur elementtis/ sacratissimi consumatur."

[52] Like Walker I have not found an edition of the *Sefer Yezirah* in which Abraham is said to have produced men by manipulating the Hebrew letters. But the fact that the book was ascribed to Abraham and discusses the creation of everything through the letters may explain this. At the end of the *Sefer Yezirah,* Abraham is also said to have "combined and formed" (Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism,* p. 169). Scholem describes a thirteenth-century German Hasid who commented on the *Sefer Yezirah* and thought Abraham had created beings through magic. He interpreted Gen. 12: 5 as a reference to this magical creation (ibid., p. 170). Detailed instructions for producing living beings from virgin earth by combining the letters does appear in the later kabbalistic treatises and in commentaries on the *Sefer Yezirah* from the twelfth century onwards (Scholem, "Golem," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*). It became part of the legend of making the *golem,* which developed among German Jews during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See alsò G. Scholem, "Der Golem von Prag und der Golem von Rehovot"; idem, "Die Vorstellung vom Golem in ihren tellurischen und magischen Beziehungen."

[53] Walker, *Magic,* p. 71.

it is hard to believe that van Helmont would not have known the work of the most famous of his Christian Kabbalist predecessors.[54] Reuchlin's first kabbalistic work, *De Verbo Mirifico* (1494), belongs in the tradition of eclectic Neoplatonic-kabbalistic works and shows little of the real understanding and appreciation of kabbalistic thought that appears in his later *De Arte Cabbalistica* (1517).[55] The *De Verbo Mirifico* is important, however, for the ideas it presents about language. Charles Zika has convincingly argued that this book belongs in the context of the magic debate.[56] In a prefatory letter, Reuchlin explains that his purpose in writing the book was to examine the occult powers and properties of names and words with the object of finding the one most powerful and magically effective name. By the end of the book Reuchlin has indeed found the name, JHSUH, the Hebrew spelling of Jesus.

Like van Helmont and von Rosenroth, Reuchlin believed that the Kabbalah was the "well" from which all later cultures and philosophies drew their ideas: "We Latin people drink from the morass, the Greeks from the brooks, the Jews from the wells."[57] Hebrew was the uncorrupted *Ursprache* and divine language of creation: "The speech of the Hebrews is simple, pure, uncorrupted, holy, brief and constant."[58] It is the language of God's revelation to man. The study of Hebrew grammar is therefore important as the key to unlock these divine secrets.[59]

Reuchlin approached his study of Hebrew with a religious, almost mystical, reverence:

> For when reading Hebrew I seem to see God speaking himself, when I think that this is the language in which God and the angels have told their merits to men from on high. And so I tremble in dread and terror, not, however, without some unspeakable joy that follows this my wonder or rather awe, which truly I will name knowledge, about which the divine word says: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."[60]

All the secrets of creation are contained in the Hebrew language, for the letters were the instruments of creation: "know that the twenty-two letters are the foundations of the world."[61] Like the author of the *Sefer Yezirah*, he divides the letters into three groups and equates each one with different objects, qualities, concepts, elements, principles, and numbers. The letters both create and mirror things. Hebrew is therefore a real, not a conventional,

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[54] Von Rosenroth refers to Reuchlin in his preface to van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* (p. 25) and in the *KD*, I, 2: 76.

[55] Scholem praises Reuchlin's kabbalistic knowledge as well as von Rosenroth's in "Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart."

[56] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico*."

[57] Quoted in Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation*, p. 80. Von Rosenroth described the Kabbalah as the "spring" from which the river of later philosophy originated (*KD*, I, 2:75-6).

[58] *De Verbo Mirifico*, sig c 5^{V}: "Simplex autem sermo: purus: incorruptus: sanctus: brevis & constans Hebraeorum est . . ."

[59] *De Accentibus et Orthographia Linguae Hebraica*, 1518, III^{V}, cited in Schwarz, p. 82.

[60] *Johannes Reuchlins Briefwechsel*, p. 123.

[61] Reuchlin, *De arte cabbalistica*, $LXXII^{V}$: "Nam duas & viginti litteras scitote fundamenta esse mundi."

language. "The Cabala is nothing else but . . . symbolic theology in which . . . letters and names are the signs of things."[62] Like Pico, Reuchlin was versed in the kabbalistic rules for permutating words and letters[63] and he considered each letter a hieroglyph, whose shape revealed its meaning.[64] He was able to make his own great contribution to knowledge by means of the kabbalistic art of letter permutations. He transformed the *Tetragrammaton* into a *Pentagrammaton*, the wonder-working word, JSHUH, or Jesus.[65] This word was magically powerful, first and foremost because it was Hebrew. Referring to Pico's magical conclusions, Reuchlin agrees that Hebrew words alone have the power to produce magical effects:

> what a certain noble philosopher recently proposed in Rome has not seemed unlearned to me: No names in a magical and licit operation have the same power as those in Hebrew or those closely derived from Hebrew, because of all things, these are firstly formed by God. That in which nature chiefly practices magic is the voice of God.[66]

Not all Hebrew words, however, are magically effective. The special power of the name JSHUH derives from the fact that through this name and its bearer, Christ, man is united with God and shares his divine knowledge and power:

> we ourselves are producers of marvelous works above human powers, and although we mortals are constituted in nature, yet we hold dominion over nature and work wonders, portents and miracles which are signs of the divinity—by the one name, which I have ventured to explain to you.[67]

Reuchlin gives extraordinary examples of the marvelous deeds produced through the wonder-working word: reviving the dead, curing the sick, exorcising demons, turning rivers into wine, feeding the hungry, repulsing pirates, and taming camels. And he describes how language protected Paul from snakes, Slyvester and Philip from dragons, and John from the Cyclops.[68] Thus the wonder-working word is immensely powerful and able to transform natures instantaneously. For this reason Reuchlin describes it as

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[62] Reuchlin, *De arte cabbalistica*, LXIX^{r}.

[63] ibid., LIV.

[64] ibid., XX^{r}: "Hic est solius verae contemplationis campus, cuius singula verba, singula sunt sacramenta, & singuli sermones, syllabes, apices, punctaque eius plena sunt arcanis sensibus, non tantum nobis autoribus, verum etiam Christianis attestantibus."

[65] Nicholas Cusa also converted the *Tetragrammaton* into the *Pentagrammaton* with the addition of *sin* in his sermons (*Haec accurata recognitio trium voluminum operum clariss, P. Nicolai Cusae Card. ex officina Ascensiona recenter emissa est*, Paris 1574, fols. LII-LX.)

[66] *De Verbo Mirifico*, sig. c 8^{v}: "Quare mihi non idocte visus est Romae nuper quidam noblis philosophus proposuisse, nulla nomina in Magica licitoque opere aeque virtutem habere, sicut hebraica bel inde proxime derivatat, eo quod omnium primum haec dei voce formantur. Illud autem in quo potissimum Magicum exercet natura, vox est dei."

[67] *De Verbo Mirifico.*, sig. b 4^{r}: "quod super vires humanas mirabilium operum ipsimet effectores sumus: simulque in natura constituti: supra naturam dominamur: & monstra: portenta: miracula divinitatis insignia: nos mortales uno verbo: quod iam pridem vobis explicare ausus sum prodigimus."

[68] Zika suggests these come from some collection of apocryphal acts of the Apostles ("Reuchlin's De Verbo Mirifico," p. 133, n. 93).

the real philosopher's stone, which alchemists have sought in vain.[69] Reuchlin was careful to limit the magical implications of his ideas by adding that Hebrew words have no intrinsic power, but only acquire power when infused with divine spirit:

> We have discovered that God has imparted to each wonder-working word a singular ray of his omnipotence which is the operative virtue of miraculous effect brought to us continually by the ministry of angels, just as by certain figures or arcane preparations as sacred Scripture attests.[70]

This was similar to van Helmont's view. Reuchlin was aware of the difficulties Pico had with the Church over his controversial conclusions. He prudently limited Pico's broader natural magic to kabbalistic notions about the power of Hebrew words and tried to subordinate even this restricted magic entirely to God and the Christian religion.

Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) was not so cautious. He used Ficino as a major source for his own brand of magic, but he openly proclaimed what Ficino had attempted to conceal: that magical operations could, and did, have transitive effects:

> Words therefore are the fittest medium betwixt the speaker and the hearer, carrying with them not only the conception of the mind, but also the vertue of the speaker with a certain efficacy unto the hearers, and this oftentimes with so great a power, that oftentimes they change not only the hearers, but also other bodies, and things that have no life.[71]

Agrippa's magic was therefore more accusably demonic and incompatible with Christianity. Agrippa quotes Ficino almost verbatim when discussing the power of words and their real relationship to things.[72] Everything in the universe breathes, giving off spirits and vapors that effect their surroundings. But when words are impressed on this spirit, it becomes a rational being, independent and able to influence other things in specific ways. Van Helmont also believed that everything "breathed" and that when this breath or spirit was combined with rational thought, it had a powerful effect for good or evil.[73]

Agrippa accepted kabbalistic ideas about the superiority of Hebrew, its divine origin, and real nature. He had given a course of lectures at the University of Dole on Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and may have known

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[69] *De Verbo Mirifico*, sig. g 7^{r}: "hic lapis philosophorum; Longe quidem eum exuperans de quo Archimici (sic) errantes contendunt."

[70] ibid., sig. f 7^{v}: "Mirifico cuique verbo deum ipsum omnipotentiae suae radium singularum indidisse: quae sit virtus operative mirabilis effectus in nos usque angelorum ministerio perlata: sicut & de figuris quibusdam aut confectionibus arcanis attestante sacro eloquio habemus compertum."

[71] Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, I: 152. Cf. Walker, *Magic*, pp. 90ff.

[72] ibid., I: 153.

[73] *Kurtzer Entwurff*, p. 58: "Nicht nur die Ideen, so von einem Menschen/ entweder durch den schall der Stimme/ oder seine gantze ausstrahlung herruhren/ sondern auch die von steinen und andern dergleichen dingen entstehen/ eine gewaltige Krafft haben in dem Leben von dem sie empfangen und aufgenommen werden."

two converted Jews who wrote on the Kabbalah, Paoli and Agostino Rici.[74] Agrippa had obviously read the *Sefer Yezirah* and calls the Hebrew letters "the foundations of the world," dividing them into three groups and connecting different letters with different elements, planets, and signs. He considered the letters hieroglyphs, whose shapes had profound meaning, and he knew the kabbalistic rules for transposing and permutating letters. However, he gives a strong astrological slant to these Kabbalistic ideas.[75] Agrippa basically reiterates ideas about sounds and images characteristic of Renaissance occultism. These same ideas also appear in Paracelsus, although he gives them a slightly new twist with his doctrine of signatures.

Paracelsus (c.1490-1541) was clearly a major influence on van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*. Jan Baptista van Helmont was one of the most famous of Paracelsus' followers. Francis Mercury van Helmont edited his father's works and was himself a Paracelsian. According to Paracelsus each created thing has an inner form or "signature" that expresses its essence. The original Adamic language (which Paracelsus did not think was current Hebrew) had embodied these signatures in its letters and names. It was therefore a natural language or real character, in which words were images of things.[76]

Paracelsus' doctrine of signatures was basically a reworking of the ancient idea of nature as a "book" written by God, in which each existing thing was a word or letter waiting to be read. It was also a variation of the Platonic theory of ideas. The signature of a thing was its idea, form, or essence and it revealed the celestial influences contained in the object. Paracelsus' ideas about language and his doctrine of signatures may have been influenced by the Kabbalah, of which he undoubtedly knew something. His description of making the homunculus (or test-tube man) reflects kabbalistic ideas about the creation of the *golem*, which, as we have seen, involved kabbalistic letter mysticism. As far as I know, however, for Paracelsus the creation of the "homonculus" was a purely alchemical, rather than a verbal, operation.[77]

Another Christian Kabbalist who influenced van Helmont was Guillaume Postel (1510-1581). Postel was one of the most fascinating characters of the sixteenth century. A missionary and mystic who started his life in the service of the Catholic Church, Postel developed a strange, personal religion in which he saw himself as a Christ-figure. He found himself a female redeem-

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[74] Nauert, *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, pp. 26, 121ff.

[75] *Occult Philosophy*, pp. 161-2.

[76] Paracelsus, *De Natura Rerum. Sämtliche Werke*, XI, 9: 397: ". . . die kunst signata leret die rechten namen geben allen dingen, die hat Adam unser erster vater volkomlich gewusst und erkantnus gehabt. dan gleich nach der schopfung hat er allen dingen eim iedwerdern seinen besondern namen geben, den tieren einem ieden besondern namen, also den beumen einem ieder seinem besondern namen, den kreutern ihr besondere unterschiedliche namen, den wurzeln ihr besondere namen, also auch den steinen, erden, metallen, wassem und andern fruchten der erden."

[77] For Paracelus and the Kabbalah see W. Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, pp. 117-215.

er and ended his days a virtual prisoner in a Catholic monastery.[78] His intellect was fearsome, his range of interests great, his thought complex, but the aim of all his varied activities was constant. Like Pico and Ficino before him and Knorr and van Helmont after, Postel worked to create one universal religion which would bring perpetual peace; and like Pico and van Helmont he looked to Hebrew as the means to this end. Postel considered Hebrew a true "clavis scientiae," a "via veritatis perdita."[79] He believed that once all men spoke Hebrew, the universe would be understandable and men would once more be able communicate directly with God. He thought this for the same reason as van Helmont. Because the Hebrew language was a mirror of reality, it was the only medium between God and the created universe. It was the link between the divine ideas in the divine mind and the perceptible universe.

Like the Kabbalists and van Helmont, Postel describes creation as the action in which the divine ideas were articulated by God and externalized as concrete, existing objects. Because human beings can have no knowledge of the existence of anything until they have a word or name with which to describe it, words must precede things. God must have known the names of things before he created them.[80] Postel published his translation of the *Sefer Yezirah*, with a commentary, which he finished before the Hebrew text had been printed (Mantua, 1562). The similarity between Postel's ideas about Hebrew and van Helmont's strongly suggests van Helmont had read Postel's commentaries with attention. Von Rosenroth mentions Postel in the *Kabbala denudata* and his correspondence.[81]

Postel draws the common kabbalistic parallel between creation and revelation. He sees both in terms of letters and speech: "for the letters are the instruments of the creation of the world and the seals of the wisdom of God."[82] The process from divine ideas to the creation of concrete entities may be reversed in the human mind by examining things, resolving them into their elements, and grasping the divine ideas behind them: "with the words broken down into their elements, the letters themselves thus inform us of the truth, as if they in reality compose those parts of matter and form."[83]

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[78] Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career & Thought of Guillaume Postel*; *idem.*, "Postel and the Significance of Renaissance Cabalism"; Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens*; idem., *Le Zôhar*. Secret has edited and translated various of Postel's works. Screech, "The Illusion of Postel's Feminism"; and the many important articles on Postel by Kuntz in the bibliography.

[79] Cited in Bouwsma, "Postel and Cabalism," p. 223.

[80] Postel, *Abrahami Patriarchae Liber Jezirah, sive Formationis Mundi* . . . , section 5.

[81] "Amica Responsio," *KD* I, 2: 76. Knorr to van Helmont, 6 February 1674. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf, 30.4., Auftrags-Nr. 5519, fol. 38.

[82] Postel, *Liber Jezirah*, section B, p. 2: "nam litterae sunt creationis mundi instrumentum, & sapientiae Dei sigilla."

[83] ibid.: "resolutis in sua elementa vocabulis sic ipsae nos informent litterae de veritate, sicut materiae et formae partes revera illas componunt."

The double process of synthesis and analysis can occur because names and things are one; they are naturally allied and cannot be separated. [84]

For Postel the Hebrew language was a divine instrument. It had not changed from the time of Adam.[85] He described a vision of the Hebrew alphabet spread out across the sky, which revealed to him "all those things which are constituted in the nature of things, not explicitly but implicitly." He insists that although scarcely anyone will believe him, his soul was seized and carried up to the highest celestial sphere to contemplate this holy alphabet.[86]

The vision of a celestial Hebrew alphabet took a more prosaic turn in the writings of Claude Duret, a Frenchman well-acquainted with kabbalistic tradition. Duret was a follower of Francesco Giorgi, a sixteenth century Neoplatonic friar, whose prolific writings are filled with kabbalistic ideas. In his substantial book, *Thesor de l'Histoire des Langues* (1613), Duret makes use of an idea found in the *Sefer Yezirah.* He divides the letters of the Hebrew alphabet into the three usual groups, the "mother" letters, the seven "double" letters and the twelve "single" letters. He relates the last two series to the seven planets and to the twelve signs of the Zodiac respectively, just as the *Sefer Yetzirah* does. Duret, however, makes a much stronger and more immediate connection between Hebrew and astrology. According to Duret, there are three causes which go into the making of each existing thing, a principle or element, the influence of a planet, and the influence of a sign. Hebrew names exactly mirror things because each name contains three letters, each referring to one of these three causes: the "mother" letters refer to the elements, the "simple" letters to the zodiacal influences and the "double" letters to the planetary influences. [87]

Although Duret believes that Hebrew has been somewhat corrupted, it had remained pure enough so that the words still contain what one might describe as the "natural history" of the thing signified.[88] He applies the same concept to individual letters and draws the kind of parallel van Helmont does between the shapes of letters and their significance. For instance, he accepts the idea expressed in the *Sefer Yezirah* that the letter *shin* (ש) stands for fire;

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[84] Postel, *Liber Jezirah*, section 19: "Ideo nec nomen a creatura, nec creatura a nomine potest separari, sed ab altero alterum movetur. In nomine res exponitur, ut ad finem & proprietatem. In re autem movetur, ut in suum proprium locum."

[85] ibid., section 5.

[86] ibid., section 8: "dixero me in coelo vidisse in ipsis linguae sanctae characteribus. . . ea onmia quae sunt in rerum Natura constituta, ut vidi non explicite sed implicite, vix ullus mihi crediderit."

[87] Duret, *Thesor de l'Histoire des Langues de Cest Univers*, pp. 40-41: "Adam ayant cognoissance qu'aux trois elements assavoir la terre, l'eau & le feu convenoyent les lettres ou characteres de l'alphabet hebrieu sequentes shin, mem, aleph, aux sept planettes, beth, gimel, daleth, caph, pe, res, tau, & aux douze signes celestes les autres lettres ou characters d'iceluy alphabet . . . avoit estime que chaque chose seroit proprement nommé, quand son nom seroit compose de trois lettres, qui designeroient ces causes surparoissantes."

[88] ibid., p. 39: "nous dirons que les noms Hebrieux desdits animaux & poissons contienent leur histoire naturelle, encor que depuis la revolte & peche d'Adam ceste cognoissance de soit de beaucoup obscurcie, qu'ainsi soit la cigongne tant louée a cause de sa charite envers ses père & mère est appelle en Hebrieu *Chasida*, c'est a dire debonnaire, charitable, douée de piété."

indeed, in its configuration *shin* does look like flames.[89] This way of thinking led Duret to the familiar conclusion that every aspect of the Hebrew alphabet is worthy of attention:

> The Jews. . . have always learned from their Cabala that there is no letter nor point in their law but that there depends from it great and high mountains, which is to say many great, high and difficult mysteries and miracles.[90]

For Duret, as for every Kabbalist including van Helmont, etymology is a saintly occupation and a source of divine knowledge:

> These very few Hebrew Cabalists have gone so far as to vouch that he who is perfectly instructed in the secrets of the Hebrew language . . . could arrive at such a degree of knowledge that he would know and perfectly understand by the Hebrew letters, points and accents, which constitute Hebrew sayings, the essence, property, action and spring of everything in the universe that has a denomination and name; and this is why etymology in the Hebrew language is above all other language so strong and perfect.[91]

The belief, so prevalent among both Jewish and Christian Kabbalists, that images and sounds were in direct touch with reality and could attract or transmit powerful emotional and creative forces provided the rationale behind complex theories of music, poetry, and oratory that developed in France and Italy during the sixteenth century. In *The Art of Memory* Frances Yates describes the efforts made by the Italian friar Guilio Camillo (c.1480-1544) to devise a system of natural (as opposed to conventional) oratory in which words would reflect both the heavens and the earth and "be" what they signified.[92] Camillo spent years trying to construct a memory theater in which every aspect of the universe was represented by a real image or symbol. Camillo arranged these real images in seven series, which began with each planet and descended through all the orders of creation dependent, according to Neoplatonic theory, on that planet. Thus the orator standing on the stage of Camillo's theater looked out on a schematic arrangement of the world represented by real, rather than conventional, symbols. With this living replica of the macrocosm imprinted on his mind, he was somehow expected to deliver a discourse in words so intimately connected to things that they would go straight to the hearts and minds of his listeners.[93]

Camillo's memory theater influenced later thinkers, who, in turn, influenced van Helmont and seventeenth century universal language schemes.

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[89] Duret, *Thesor de l'Histoire des Langues*, pp. 40-41.

[90] ibid., p. 147: "les Juifs . . . ont . . . tousiours appris par leur Cabale qu'il n'y a lettre ou apicule en leur loy desquelles ne dépendent plusieurs grandes & hautes montagnes, c'est à dire plusieurs grands hauts & ardus mystères & miracles."

[91] ibid., p. 41: "iceux Cabalistes Hebrieux ont passé si avant d'asseurer que celui qui seroit parfaictement instruit aux secrets de la langue hebraique . . . pourroit parvenir à tel degré de cognoissance qu'il cognoistroit & entendroit parfaictement, par les lettres, poincts & accens hebrieux, constituans les dictions hebraiques, l'essence, vertu, action & ressort de toutes les choses de cest univers, lesquelles ont denomination & appellation, ce qui est cause que l'Etymologie en la langue hebraique est sur toutes autres Langues si forte et si pregnante."

[92] Yates, *The Art of Memory*, chs. 6-7.

[93] Walker, *Magic*, pp. 125ff.

The theater was known in France, where it had attracted the financial support of Francis I. Camillo's scheme may have contributed to the experiments with poetry and music made by members of Baif's academy in the later sixteenth century. The aim of these academicians was to devise a kind of poetry set to music that would heal religious divisions and bring peace to a dangerously divided kingdom. As Frances Yates has described the aims and accomplishments of Baif's academy in *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, it is only necessary to point out the similarities between the concept of powerfully effective, musical poetry and the ideas about sound and language we have already found in the Kabbalists, Ficino, Pico, Lazarelli, Reuchlin and Agrippa. The musical languages devised by Godwin, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Wilkins in the seventeenth century built on this earlier tradition.[94]

The influence of Camillo's theater extended into the seventeenth century through the writings of Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) and Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654). Campanella was a heretical Dominican friar, a revolutionary reformer and magician, whose services were accepted by the Pope. His ideas about language have a lot in common with van Helmont's, and they influenced the progressive work on language reform done between 1640 and 1670. Campanella accepted the Neoplatonic-kabbalistic-Hermetic belief that words are representative or imitative symbols either onomatopoetically or hieroglyphically—in other words, that they are real or natural. He made the same connection van Helmont later did between the movements of the speech organs and the meaning of a word. *Altum*, for example, means high because the tongue is raised to the highest part of the palate. The tongue moves according to the nature of the thing it signifies. Campanella also mentions the effects of climate upon language and like Helmont considered corrupt speech the cause of corrupt and imperfect knowledge.[95]

Campanella was well acquainted with the current ideas about sounds, images, and spirits, and he was familiar with the occult side of the art of memory. His most popular book, the *City of the Sun*, is, in part, a memory system in the tradition of Camillo.[96] It describes a utopia where the inhabitants live in peace and happiness. Their city is a beautiful reflection of the universe; every created thing is painted in hierarchically organized series on the city wall.[97] Like Camillo, Campanella thought that as the inhabitants viewed the memory images, a harmonious vision of the cosmos would be

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[94] Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1700.* pp. 121ff.

[95] Campanella, *Realis Philosopohiae epilogisticae . . . hoc est de rerum natura, hominum moribus, politica . . . & oeconomica, cum adnotationibus physiologis . . .*, I, xxi, vii, pp. 159-160.

[96] Yates, *GBHT*, ch. 20; eadem, *Memory*, pp. 297-8, 377-8.

[97] The city as *imago mundi* is an ancient concept. See Eliade, "The World, the City, the House"; Whatley, *The City as a Symbol*; Rubenstein, "The Cave, the Rock, and the Tent: The Meaning of Place."

imprinted on their minds. Understanding the true natures of all things, they had no use for disputes and lived together amicably.[98]

Andreae's own utopia, *Christianopolis*, had much in common with Campanella's *City of the Sun* and Camillo's Theater.[99] Behind all three lay the idea that ignorance and misunderstanding are the causes of political and religious strife; true knowledge based on the understanding of things as they really are will lead to a utopian world. As the medium of thought and communication, language is an important factor in this vision. The orator in Camillo's Theater could move and influence his audience because his words were reflections of divine knowledge. The citizens of Christianopolis possessed the same power to speak compellingly because their words were simple, clear, and unambiguously connected to the reality of things:

> if one speaks thoughtfully, modestly, and heartily, he has outdone Cicero in eloquence. To speak briefly, whatever breathes the spirit, will have tremendous effect. Whatever smacks of artificiality will be powerless. He has accomplished much who has acquired a taste of God's style; for what fools consider simpleness is nothing other than wisdom.[100]

Andreae appears, however, to take a more narrowly Christian view of knowledge than either Campanella or Camillo. His memory system, or the pictures appearing on the walls of *Christianopolis*, provide a Christian view of the world. When the protagonist in Andreae's book meets the wise citizen of Christianopolis, who presides over the halls of learning, he learns how deeply-rooted the Christian faith of the inhabitants is:

> When I inquired as to the sum of all learning, he mentioned Christ and Him crucified, saying that all things pointed toward Him. . . . To the Church were due, he said, all tongues, all history, all reasoning, all signs of nature, all arts of the heavens.[101]

Andreae puts boundaries to the field of knowledge, restricting it to a specifically Christian texts. Ficino's and Pico's eclecticism, their conviction that every system of philosophy contains some aspect of divine truth, seems to have vanished.

> The citizens seemed to me not to consider the use of the library very highly, and they were satisfied with fewer books—the more thorough ones. The highest authority among them is that of sacred literature, that is, of the Divine Book; and this is the prize which they recognize as conceded by divine gift to men and of inexhaustible mysteries. . . . This is the ardent desire of all, to realize how little one really knows, and from this starting point to aspire to the true knowledge and to disdain the vain boast of the human mind. But there are many things which it is expedient not to know in this life, wherefore a holy simplicity is for many a library in itself. Others say they have enough to study

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[98] Yates has pointed out that the images on the walls of Campanella's city have their origin in magic, and black magic at that. A similar series of images decorated the ideal city of Hermes Trismegistus, Adocentyn, which is described in the notorious *Picatrix* (*GBHT*, p. 54).

[99] Yates, *The Art Memory*, p. 378.

[100] Andreae, *Christianopolis*, p. 187.

[101] ibid.

> out of the volume of this universe. While very many assert that they find more within themselves and trace the sources of all arts more easily, than out of whole piles of books. And so they are disgusted with all the things in the world which do not have in them anything godly, and they collect them for a mockery of the human mind that they may convince their people of the uselessness of such. Farewell then to books, if we follow them only! Hail Christ.[102]

Had Andreae learned to suspect these other sources as a result of the Reformation? He was a Lutheran and although he continued in the tradition of Renaissance Neoplatonism, it was with apparent reservations.[103] In many respects van Helmont would have agreed with the views expressed by Andreae in *Christianopolis*. Like Andreae, van Helmont firmly believed in the vanity of all learning compared to the knowledge contained in the Bible; he too hated intellectual pride and stressed personal humility; and like the citizens of *Christianopolis*, Francis Mercury accepted the analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm and believed that one can learn most by looking within oneself.

Andreae's ideas appear less orthodox if one accepts the view of many scholars that he was one of the authors of the notorious *Rosicrucian Manifestos*.[104] It is important to discuss the *Manifestos* in some detail (and this will be done in Chapter Seven) because they emerged in a Lutheran context and represented a reaction against the harsh doctrines of predestination and human sinfulness characteristic of orthodox Lutheran theology. They offered a Protestant version of the Renaissance synthesis of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and the Kabbalah and provided a channel through which the ecumenical outlook of Renaissance humanists was transmitted to Counter-Reformation Europe on the eve of the Thirty Years' War. The *Rosicrucian Manifestos* are an important source for understanding Knorr and van Helmont, for as I argue in a later chapter, the court at Sulzbach can be aptly described as "Rosicrucian."

Jakob Boehme is another Lutheran figure of the utmost importance both for his influence on Rosicrucianism thinking and for his theories about language. The Paracelsian doctrine of signatures was taken up by Boehme, who incorporated the doctrine into his writings on a natural language. With Boehme we arrive at what seems to be the most direct source, apart from the Kabbalah itself, for van Helmont's ideas on language. Boehme's theosophy presents the same eclectic blend of Neoplatonism, the Kabbalah and Paracelsian alchemy that one finds in van Helmont. All the major ideas about language in Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* and *Thoughts on Genesis* are scattered throughout the earlier writings of Boehme.[105] The one important

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[102] Andreae, *Christianopolis*, p. 191.

[103] Yates, *GBHT*, pp. 142-143.

[104] This was first suggested by Gottfried Arnold (*Unparteysche Kirchen und Ketzerhistorie*, II: 613ff.) but other authors have been suggested as well, for example Christoph Besold and Wilhelm Wense. For a discussion of this issue, see Bernard Gorceix, *La Bible des Rose-Croix* (introduction), who favors Andreae as the author.

[105] Benz, "Die Schöpferische Bedeutung des Wortes bei Jacob Boehme"; Kayser, "La Doctrine du language naturel chez Jacob Boehme"; Hankamer, *Die Sprache. Ihr Begriff und*

difference between them is that Boehme did not consider Hebrew the original language of nature but believed each mother tongue expressed the essence of things in its own way.[106]

The basic idea behind Boehme's theory of a natural language was that man was made in God's image. As the microcosm and reflection of God, we contain the essence and qualities of all things. When speaking we combine these elements in exactly the same way God did when he created them. To name something is therefore to recreate the essence of the thing out of the qualities within ourselves: "Whatsoever God is in his nature, that the spirit of man is in itself: and therefore he giveth every thing its name, according to the spirit and the form of every thing, for the inward speaketh forth the outward."[107] Every letter in the language of nature has a specific meaning deriving from its shape and sound. The sibilant, hissing sound associated with "sch" or "f" is, for example, associated with the devil. Like van Helmont, Boehme connects the sound of the letter "r" with creation.[108] Boehme emphasizes in exactly the same way van Helmont does the significance that the movements of the tongue, teeth, and lips have for the meaning of letters and words.[109] Although human speech is the image of divine speech, it is not identical. Man cannot create through speech; he can only name. This would seem to preclude the magical use of words.[110] However, each letter and word in the language of nature is an independent "spirit," which expresses the essence of things. This idea leads Boehme to the same conclusion van Helmont reached later, that a man is responsible for his every word. [111] Words are like seeds, active forces with power to develop into fruit or tares.[112] This would seem to put back an element of magic in Boehme's thought.

Like van Helmont, Boehme believed that if men would only observe the way letters were formed, they would regain an understanding of the language of nature: "If you would understand that language, observe in your mind, how each word from the heart is framed in the mouth, and what the mouth

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ihre Deutung in sechzehnten Jahrhundert, ch. 5; Schlieff, "Sprachphilosophie und Inspirationstheorie im Denken des 17. Jahrhunderts"; Meinhold, *Luthers Sprachphilosophie*, ch. 6, pp. 45-59. See also John Schulitz, *Jakob Böhme und die Kabbalah*.

[106] Boehme was one of the first to value the German language (*Mysterium Magnum*, German edition, chapter 35; *Aurora*, German edition, chapter 8), a view which gained increasing support during the seventeenth century from Leibniz, among others. See Benz and Kayser on this point. Von Rosenroth was also concerned with the use and improvement of German. He was a member of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (K. Salecker, *Christian Knorr von Rosenroth*, p. 8).

[107] *Von dreyfachen Leben*, ch. 6, p. 917; *The High and Deep Searching out of the Three-Fold Life of Man through . . . the Three Principles*, pp. 146-7.

[108] See *Aurora, oder Morgenrothe im Aufgang*; Konopake, *The Descent into Words: Jakob Boehme's Transcendental Linguistics*, pp. 9, 75, 110.

[109] *Mysterium Magnum . . .*, trans. J. Sparrow, London, 1654.

[110] Benz., "Die Schöpferische Bedeutung des Wortes bei Jacob Boehme," p. 14.

[111] Boehme, *Concerning the Three Principles of the Divine Essense of the Eternal, Dark, Light and Temporary World*, p. 137.

[112] ibid.

and tongue do with it, before the spirit sendeth it forth."[113] Unfortunately, we lost this knowledge with the Fall: "in this place lieth the heavy fall of Adam, in which we lost what we had in the (state of) innocence."[114] With the Fall came that contention and strife over words that has continually plagued mankind and destroyed the true knowledge of God:

> our learned ones do term themselves doctors and masters, and yet none of them understands his mother tongue. They understand no more of the spirit than the country man doth of his tool of the tillage of his ground; they use only the bare contrived form of the gross compounded words, and understand not what the word is in its sense; hence ariseth the contention and strife witherwith men contend and jangle about God and his will; men will teach what God is, and yet understand not the least of God.[115]

Boehme's influence was particularly wide-spread among radical religious groups. The so-called "plain style" advocated by the Quakers was deeply indebted to Boehme's ideas and to the whole tradition of the *Ursprache* and Adamic language described in this chapter. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, believed that a "pure language of the Spirit of Truth" had existed in Eden but degenerated after the Fall and confusion of Babel, leaving a pale reflection in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.[116] Only through divine inspiration could this lost *Ursprache* be recovered. The Quakers believed that like the apostles and early Christians they were directly inspired by God and therefore spoke the "pure" or "plain" language foretold by Zephaniah.[117] Learning was therefore unnecessary and a university education a waste of time, for the Christian doctrine of the *logos* made it clear that the "Word" was not something that could either be taught or learned. Just as sin caused the loss of the spiritual language Adam had spoken in the Garden of Eden, so would redemption make good that loss and redeem men from sin by infusing them with the Holy Ghost or Spirit of God. This infusion of divine spirit would enable them to speak "the Word" rather than sinful words.

The Quakers shared Boehme's anti-intellectualism, making a virtue of the fact they were "labouring and mechanic men," as Barclay once described them. Since no special training was necessary for those inspired by God, anyone, even women, could speak and transmit the word of God. This was an extremely radical position at a time when the majority of Christians accepted without question Paul's injunction that women should be silent and not preach or teach. Margaret Fell, George Fox's wife and an articulate

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[113] Boehme, *Three-fold Life in Man*, p. 145.

[114] ibid.

[115] Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* (English edition), p. 353.

[116] See for example the pamphlet written by Fox, John Stubbs, and Benjamin Furly, *A Battle-Door for Teachers and Professors to Learn Singular and Plural.*

[117] George Fox, *Concerning Good-Morrow and Good-Even*, pp. 6-7. Zephaniah 3: 9-13. This is discussed more fully in Bauman, *Let Your Words be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers*, pp. 6ff.

speaker for Quakerism, defends the right of women to speak in her pamphlet *Women's Speaking*.[118]

One of the reasons why van Helmont joined the Quakers was because he shared their anti-intellectualism and dislike of the pretentiously learned. He too believed in the possibility of recovering the *Ursprache* and felt that if men spoke from the heart, their words carried great power to do good. Like the Quakers, he put a premium on good deeds rather than fine words. He wrote his *Alphabet of Nature* in the hope of recapturing the pure language of Adam in which names were mirror images of things. Only with the recovery of such a language would an end be brought to the strife of words that had torn the Church apart.

[118] In *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences*. The Quaker position on women was less radical than it might appear to be because it wasn't as women that women were allowed to speak but as persons inspired by God. Cf. Mack, *Visionary Women*.

CHAPTER SIX

CHRISTIAN KNORR VON ROSENROTH AND THE *KABBALA DENUDATA*

Van Helmont's meeting with Knorr von Rosenroth and his success in persuading him to settle in Sulzbach was a major event in his life and another turning point in the court culture at Sulzbach. It marked the beginning of a scholarly collaboration that led to the publication of many books on kabbalistic themes. Knorr's knowledge of Hebrew has been praised by Gershom Scholem.[1] But von Rosenroth was more than an accomplished Hebraist; he was a true "Renaissance man." In addition to his study of theology, law, philosophy, philology, history, numismatics, and natural science, he was fascinated by language, and in addition to his native German he became proficient in Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, Arabic, French, Dutch, English, and Spanish.[2]

Von Rosenroth's first biographer, his great-nephew, Christian Gottlieb Unger, claims that he continued his study of oriental languages while in Amsterdam and in the employ of an exiled Armenian prince.[3] He studied Hebrew and Jewish mysticism there as well under the tutelage of Thomas de Pinedo (1614-79), Isaac de Rocamora (1601-84), and Rabbi Meir (ben Juda Levie) Stern (d. 1679).[4] At some point he became acquainted with the millenarian Peter Serrarius and various groups of Mennonites and Quakers.[5] It was apparently among these sectarians that he met Francis Mercury van Helmont. In 1659 von Rosenroth became a member of the "Deutschgesinnte Genossenschaft" on the recommendation of Phillip von Zesen. He later mentions with approval two other societies devoted to the promotion of the German language.[6] R.J.W. Evans has persuasively argued that these societies were founded to revive and foster the kind of ecumenical humanism characteristic of the Renaissance.[7]

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[1] In his article on Knorr von Rosenroth in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

[2] The best modern source of information on von Rosenroth appears in the articles published in *Morgen-Glanz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth Gesellschaft*, edited by Italo Michele Battafarano.

[3] He gives no evidence for this, but there apparently were a considerable number of Armenian refuges in Europe at the time. See Finke and Handschur's translation of Unger's biography ("Christian Knorrs von Rosenroth Lebenslauf," p. 36 n. 11.)

[4] Rabbi Stern became the Chief Rabbi of the community of German Jews in Amsterdam (ibid., p. 36, n. 12)

[5] Blekastad claims that Knorr actually lived for a period with Serrarius "um echte jüdische Kabbala zu erlernen" (*Comenius*, p. 639).

[6] Die Fruchtbringende Gesellschafft and Der Elbescwanen-Orden. Knorr mentions these in his preface to van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*, p. 6.

[7] R.J.W. Evans, "Learned Societies in Germany in the Seventeenth Century."

Knorr was like van Helmont in many respects. Their thought clearly represents a continuation of Renaissance natural philosophy and the incorporation of this philosophy into seventeenth century mystical theology. They followed what Broek and Hanegraaf have described as "the third component of western culture," an ancient tradition that emphasized the importance of inner enlightenment or gnosis.[8] Both were familiar with the works of Renaissance Neoplatonists, particularly those of Pico della Mirandola and Marsilius Ficino. They studied those ancient texts known collectively as the *prisca theologia*, and became experts in the esoteric lore of the Lurianic Kabbalah. Knorr translated three classical texts in the Renaissance natural magic tradition—Porta's *Magia Naturalis*, Jan Baptista van Helmont's *Ortus Medicinae,* and Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*—and he refers in his writings to Cornelius Agrippa, Athanasius Kircher, Guillaume Postel, Paracelsus, Robert Fludd, and Jakob Boehme. The outlook of von Rosenroth and van Helmont agree in all essentials. Most importantly, they both rejected Cartesian dualism and the mechanical philosophy in favor of an animistic and monistic philosophy derived from a combination of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and the Kabbalah.

Von Rosenroth's interest in the occult was more than literary. He, like van Helmont, was a practicing alchemist and describes a trip he made to a Parisian cemetery in search of the proper material for the philosopher's stone.[9] He had the reputation of a magus in his own right, which may explain a contemporary's description of him as "selzam, doch lieblich" (strange but charming).[10] Knorr's skill in chemistry was so great that he was believed to possess formulas for miraculous medicines. Unger reports that he could cure people given up for dead. He also was reputed to have foretold the hour of his death.[11] His daughter, Anna Dorothea (1669-1726), contributed to his posthumous reputation by leaving a written record of a visit he made to her from beyond the grave.[12] For all his accomplishments, von Rosenroth was surprising unassuming. In an age when the quest for fame and glory was paramount, he was nick-named "Schamhaftigen" because of his unusual modesty, which revealed itself in his penchant for publishing his books under the pseudonyms Peganius or Rautner. He took this last name from his birthplace, Raudten, a city in Silesia from which his family had been forced to flee during the Thirty Years' War. The Greek word *peganon* is the equivalent of the German "Raute," and both signify the bitter herb "rue," an appropriate play on words, given Knorr's distressed childhood The impact of

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[8] R. van den Broek and W.J. Hanegraaf, *Gnosis and Hermeticism. From Antiquity to Modern Times,* p. x.

[9] See his translation of Porta, pp. 207-8.

[10] A phrase coined by Phillip Zesen in *Das Hochdeutsche Helikonishe Rosenthal. Amsterdam,* 1669, pp. 112-13. Salecker, *Christian Knorr von Rosenroth* (1636-1689), p. 6.; Finke, "Christian Knorr von Rosenroth als Schüuler und Student," p.p. 21ff.

[11] Salecker, *Von Rosenroth,* p. 4. On his chemical prowess, also see Finke and Hndschur, "Christian Knorrs von Rosenroth Lebenlauf, "p. 45.

[12] Hanover, Niedersächsiche Landesbibliothek, LBr 17.

the Thirty Years' War fostered the life-long desire for peace and religious unity so characteristic of his thought, activities, and poetry:

> Fried allein ist Freud und Leben.
> Fried kann gen Himmel heben.
> Fried allein ist, der die Welt
> in gewünschtem Stand erhält.
> Wo der Fried wird verlohren
> ist man als nur halb geboren.[13]
>
> (Peace is joy and Life.
> Peace lifts one to heaven.
> Peace alone keeps the world
> in an ideal condition.
> Where peace has been lost,
> Man is only half alive.)

Von Rosenroth has been characterized by some historians as a mystic with a medieval temperament, whose pessimistic outlook led to the rejection of this world and a retreat into quietism.[14] The fact that he translated Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and incorporated the Boethian image of the world as a prison into his own poetry would appear to support this interpretation:

> Hier lieg ich gefangen
> In irdischer Gruft
> Schier tod vor Verlangen
> Nach besserer Luft
> Ich kann mich kaum regen vor Fessel und Band
> Mein Fleisch ist die Kette, die Welt ist die Wand;
> Der Satan ist Scherge, der sperrt mir die Hand.[15]
>
> (Here I lie imprisoned
> in an earthly tomb
> dead with longing
> to breathe in new life.
> I can scarcely move for fetter and shackle.
> My flesh is the chain;
> The world is the barrier;
> And Satan the henchman, who blocks my way.)

But this assessment of von Rosenroth's character fails to do justice to his intense involvement in the world or to explain his commitment to reform. He did not retreat into an ivory tower or escape into the particularism of a religious sect, as many of his contemporaries did, but spent his working life actively engaged in government affairs as a privy councilor and adviser to Prince Christian August. Knorr's employment further exposed him to the religious conflicts endemic in seventeenth century Europe. Born a Lutheran, he remained fiercely loyal to that denomination even after he made the decision to accept employment under the Catholic Prince Christian August. Although employed by a Catholic, von Rosenroth's tolerance for Cath-

[13] Von Rosenroth, *Coniugium Phoebi et Palladis*, B
[14] Ritschl takes this position and he is to a large extent followed by Salecker (pp. 50ff.)
[15] Von Rosenroth, *Neuer Helikon*, Aria xviii, 1

olicism was limited. When he discovered that his daughter planned to marry a Catholic, he wrote an intemperate letter, in which he referred to the "abgotterei," "tyrannei," "heuchelei," and "betrugerei" of the Catholic Church.[16] It was one of the ironies of Knorr's life that he spent his adult years in the service of a Catholic Prince, but, of course, Christian August's Catholicism was unusual to say the least. Knorr was on very good terms with the Prince, who officially recorded his wish that Knorr instruct both him and his children.[17] When Knorr died, Christian August felt his absence keenly and said he had lost an adviser whose like he would never see again.[18] According to Unger, he could hardly hold back his tears, so powerful were the memories of all the years they had spent studying Hebrew and performing chemical experiments together.[19]

Von Rosenroth was an active participant in the scientific debates of the period. As a student he had shown a keen interest in science, particularly chemistry and medicine. When taking the "Grand Tour" prescribed for all young gentlemen of the period, he visited Magdeburg and the garden of the celebrated Otto von Guericke, where he observed various water mechanisms. While on the same tour and visiting Amsterdam, he stopped to see Jan Swammerdam's collection of rarities.[20] It has only recently been discovered that later in life he became a member of the French Academie Royale des Sciences.[21] He also corresponded with Henry Oldenburg and Viscount Brouncker, the respective Secretary and President of England's Royal Society, offering to send news of any interesting developments or discoveries made by scientists in Germany. Indeed, Brouncker had first contacted him in the hopes that he would become a foreign correspondent. Knorr corresponded with Robert Boyle and Henry More as well, both members of

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[16] "Schreiben an seine alteste Fraulein Tochter," *Fortgesezte Sammlung von Alten and Neuen Theologischen Sachen*, p. 413ff. In their introduction to the reprint of von Rosenroth's translation of J.B. van Helmont's works (*Aufgang der Artzey-Kunst. . .* , p. xxxiii) Pagel and Kemp claim that there is absolutely no proof that Knorr wrote this because of his daughter's marriage. However, the fact that his daughter had the dreams she had, in which her father appeared to her while in purgatory (which he as a Lutheran would have rejected) and that in these dreams he did not say anything negative about Catholicism but implicitly assured her that she had earned a place in heaven, suggests she was desperate for her father's post-mortem approbation. Salecker argues that Knorr's detestation of Catholicism was the result of his experiences as a child during the Thirty Years' War. His father, a Protestant Minister, had been forced to move several times during the war, finally dying a martyr to his faith (Salecker, *Von Rosenroth*, p. 18ff.). Knorr's attitude towards Catholicism was remarkably like Henry More's. Both men had a blind spot for the Church of Rome, which was out of keeping with their generally tolerant and gentle natures.

[17] Salecker, *Von Rosenroth*, p. 42.

[18] Cited in ibid., p. 43: "einen solchen Berater an ihn verliere, wie er ihm nie wideer erhalten werde."

[19] Finke and Handschur, "Christian Knorrs von Rosenroth Lebenlauf," p. 45.

[20] Knorr kept a diary in which he describes his travels. Gemert, "Christian Knorr von Rosenroth unterwegs. Reisen im 17. Jahrhundert." See also Finke, "Christian Knorr von Rosenroth als Schuler und Student, pp. 27, 29;

[21] ibid., p. 43 n.

the Royal Society.[22] More's concept of a world soul so appealed to von Rosenroth that he translated large portions of More's *Immortality of the Soul* and published these together with his translation of Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica.* Von Rosenroth's interest in science led him to collect mathematical instruments and natural curiosities. His worldly involvement is further evidenced by the edition he published of his father's treatise on statecraft,[23] as well as by the translation he made with van Helmont of Pisani's *Lycurgus Italicus*, which, as remarked on earlier, reflects his (and van Helmont's) abiding concern with social reform. All of von Rosenroth's activities described thus far were a prelude to and preparation for his most elaborate literary venture, the publication of the *Kabbala denudata.* This work is historically important in terms of both Jewish-Christian relations and the emergence of the ideas of toleration and progress.

In recent years scholars have qualified the traditional view of the Renaissance and Reformation as periods of philo-Semitism[24] by revealing the very real limits to this phenomenon, together with the increasing hostility to Jews and Judaism. The attempt to distinguish between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism made by Shimon Markish, for example, has been undermined by the work of Heiko Oberman, Jerome Friedman, R. Po-chia Hsia, and John Edwards, among others.[25] In the view of these scholars the enthusiasm of Renaissance Christians for Hebraica, characteristic of Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, was a fragile, ephemeral thing, first dampened by the Reuchlin-Pffeferkorn controversy and then fundamentally distorted by the conflicts of the Reformation period. By the mid-sixteenth century "judaizing" became an all-too-convenient, pejorative epithet for Catholics in their fight against Protestants and for Protestants in their fight against each other. With the reaffirmation of the Vulgate as divinely inspired at the Council of Trent, the Catholic interest in Hebraica, which had always been less than the Protestant, diminished even further. The popular Catholic revival of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries further encouraged anti-Semitic sentiments by resuscitating charges of blood libel that had largely been discredited.[26] In such a situation many of the embattled Christian Hebraists who were left jumped on the bandwagon of anti-Semitism to prove that they

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[22] These letters are preserved in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek (Cod-Guelf, 30.4, Auftrags-Nr. 5519).

[23] *Anführung zur teutschen Staatskunst, darinnen die Lehr von öffentlichen und allgemeinen Reichsrechten Erzählungsweise vorgetragen.*

[24] Schoeps, *Philosemitismus in Barock.*

[25] Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews*; Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*; Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*; Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*; Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*; Edwards, "Race and Religion in Fifteenth-and Sixteenth-Century Spain: The 'Purity of Blood' Laws Revisited;" Burrent, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews"; Coudert, "Christliche Hebraisten des 17. Jahrhunderts."

[26] Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp. 218, 222, n. 76.

were good Christians because they hated Jews like everyone else.[27] While attitudes towards Jews may have been "disenchanted," to use Hsia's phrase, and stripped of their magical and sacramental character, new forms of anti-Semitism emerged predicated on overtly racial stereotypes.[28]

In his book on sixteenth century Christian Hebraica, Friedman argues that the Christian Hebraists whose work was most affected by the increasingly anti-Semitic atmosphere were the Lutherans. By the 1540s Luther abandoned his early conciliatory attitude towards the Jews and wrote the virulently anti-Semitic tracts in which he made it abundantly clear that when it came to interpreting Scripture, Lutherans had nothing whatsoever to learn from Jews. "We do not give a fig for their crazy glosses which have spun out of their own heads," he exclaimed in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. "We have a clear text."[29] The clear text came from faith. As Luther said, "If I know what I believe in, then I know what is written in Scripture, for Scripture contains nothing but Christ and Christian faith."[30]

Rabbis were bad and their Talmudic glosses useless; but Kabbalists were even worse because in Luther's view they practiced magic.[31] Luther's vehement attack on magic was part of his larger attack on works as a means to salvation. His hatred of both Kabbalists and Talmudists was in direct proportion to their emphasis on works as pleasing to God and essential to salvation.

The virulence of Lutheran anti-Semitism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been emphasized by Hsia. He gives the example of the Lutheran Pastor, George Schwartz, whose denunciations of Jews were even more violent than Luther's. In his diatribe, *Juden Feind*, Schwartz resurrects all the old charges against the Jews—host desecration, ritual murder, and well-poisoning—and he makes it clear that Jews can never be anything else but Jews. The promise of Galatians 3: 28 is null and void in their case:

> A Jew is a Jew, baptized or circumcised, for all I care.
> Even if they are of diverse origins, they belong to a guild.
> They all serve one god, whom Christ named Mammon.
> Who in the end with his servants, will go to the Devil's oven.

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[27] Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 181. See also Kenneth R. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry, 1555-1593*; idem, "The Burning of the Talmud in 1553 in the Light of Sixteenth Century Catholic Attitudes toward the Talmud."

[28] Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp. 131ff.

[29] Luther, *Works*, 47: 196.

[30] Cited in Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, p. 132.

[31] "They invent many lies about the name of God, the tetragrammaton, saying that our Lord was able to define this name (which they call Schem Hamphoras), and whoever is able to do that, they say, is also able to perform all sorts of miracles. However, they cannot cite a single instance of any men who worked a miracle worth a gnat by means of this Schem Hamphoras" (Luther, *Works*, 47: 256).

For Schwartz, tolerating Jews "meant warming snakes in one's bosom and nurturing wolves in one's house."[32] This analogy of Jews to poisonous and dangerous animals was just one of the many tactics used by Schwartz to dehumanize them. Hsia identifies Swartz's brand of anti-Semitism as something new and peculiar to Lutheran circles because of its overtly racial character:

> The *Juden Feind* incorporated two traditions. First, it inherited the motifs of medieval anti-Semitism, which had focused on the religion of the Jews. The charge of blasphemy, stubbornness, arrogance, and avarice were all based on the fundamental charge of false religion. But this was an anti-Semitism that held out the promise of acceptance through conversion. Second, it bore the fruit of a new form of anti-Jewish polemic born out of the evangelical movement, which identified an innate, racial character to the Jewish refusal to convert, no doubt as a result of the evangelical clergy's anger with the fruitlessness of their Jewish missions. . . . The new Lutheran anti-Semitism drew its sources from several writers of the first Reformation generation. . . . Schwartz invoked the works of Johann Reuchlin, Paul Ricius, Sebastian Münster, Martin Bucer, and, of course, Martin Luther. Although Lutheran anti-Semitism assumed many motifs from the medieval polemical texts, a new emphasis was given to the immutable, essentialist, and, to employ an anachronistic concept, the racial character of the German Jews.[33]

Hsia suggests Lutheran anti-Semitism may have escalated because of the failure of Lutheran missionary activities among the Jews. Martin Friedrich agrees. He argues that seventeenth century Lutherans had no real respect or appreciation for Jews and little concern with missionizing.[34]

Given the vehemence of Luther's anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic sentiment in general, it is perhaps surprising to find that the largest and most important collection of kabbalistic texts published in Latin in the seventeenth century was the *Kabbala denudata*, and that it was edited and translated by a staunch Lutheran, with the help of van Helmont and Christian August.[35] In an emotionally charged passage at the beginning of the work, Knorr describes the trials, dangers, and outright hatred that his interest in the Kabbalah have brought upon himself, his family, and his teacher:

> From this you will know with how much devotion, indeed with what danger to my own health and life I am borne towards you—I say nothing about the expenses. Nor did I allow myself to be discouraged when towards the beginning (of my work) two of my teacher's children died (my teacher, who

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[32] Georg Schwartz, *Juden Feind, Von den Edelen Früchten der Tahlmyudischen Jüden/ so jetziger Zeit in Teutschlande wonen.* . . (n.p., 1570). Cited in Hisia, "The Usurious Jew: Economic Structure and Religious Representations in an Anti-Semitic Discourse," p. 169.

[33] ibid., pp. 169-170, 171.

[34] Friedrich, *Zwischen Abwehr und Bekehrung: Die Stellung der deutschen evangelischen Theologie zum Judentum in siebzehnten Jahrhundert.*

[35] The *Kabbala denudata* was published in three parts, the first in 1677, the second in 1678, and the third in 1684. Since the first two parts are generally bound together in one volume (as in the 1974 Olms reprint), I refer to these in the following notes as *KD* I. But since there are four distinct parts with separate pagination in this bound volume, I have tried to make it easier for the reader to find passages by referring to *KD* I, 1; *KD* I, 2; *KD* I, 3; *KD* I, 4 (followed by page numbers). I refer to the separately bound volume of 1684 as *KD* II.

> was already old and whose name I omit on account of the hatred of his relatives and co-religionists, otherwise he ought not to be deprived of praise); soon the same number were lost to me, which my teacher interpreted as a punishment for the publication of this doctrine.[36] Neither was I deterred by so many warnings of all my friends. I persevered with one aim alone, that I might be of service to you; so that the knowledge of Hebrew matters should no longer be concerned with mere ritual, still less with grammar, but should reach to the things themselves which should then be compared with the phrases and doctrines of the new covenant, to see if by chance by this means it would be possible to facilitate the conversion of the Jewish race to the faith of Jesus Christ.[37]

How do we explain this enthusiasm for the Kabbalah on the part of a Lutheran Hebraist, a judaizing Catholic-Quaker-Seeker, and a princely Catholic convert? The hundred odd years separating Luther's death from the publication of the *Kabbala denudata* had clearly effected great changes in the religious outlook of some of those who still considered themselves members of particular Christian denominations. On the basis of the recent work on Jewish and Christian millenarians, which confirms Kolakowski's earlier insights about the growing spirit of ecumenism and the rejection of institutionalized Christianity, it is apparent that seventeenth century Europe was criss-crossed by networks of millenarian Christians and Jews, who were convinced that the Messiah either had arrived or shortly would. [38] The exhilarating optimism and ecumenism characteristic of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* and *Nine Hundred Theses* resurfaces in the innumerable, though largely forgotten texts of these millenarians. Von Rosenroth's monumental *Kabbala denudata* exemplifies this genre. Within what appears to be a narrowly esoteric work, one finds the basis for the kind of tolerant ecumenism and belief in progress that are generally associated with the Enlightenment, but which had their beginnings far earlier among Italian Humanists. In the court of Christian August of Sulzbach we have evidence for a continuation of the "Rosicrucian Enlightenment" described by Frances Yates in connection with the earlier court of Frederick, the Palatine Elector, at Heidelberg.[39] Yates' thesis that Renaissance Hermeticism with its ecumenism and exhilarating faith in man's ability to restore the world to its

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[36] Knorr may be referring to Rabbi Moses Hauser, a Polish Jew who moved to Sulzbach. Knorr studied the Kabbalah both with him and with his son, Rabbi Joseph, who also taught Christian August (Finke and Handschur, "Christian Knorrs von Rosenroth Lebenlauf," p. 45).

[37] Von Rosenroth, "Lectori Philebraeo Salutem!," *KD*, II, 1:18-19: "Unde cognoscere poteris quanto studio, in te ferar, imo cum periculo propriae sanitatis & vitae meae: ut de bonis & sumtibus nihil dicam. Nec deterreri me passus sum cum circa initia magistro meo jam seni, cujus nomen ob odium contribulium ejus reticeo, alias sua laude haud privandum, duo morerrentur liberi; & mox totidem & mihi, quod ille in poenam publicatae hujus doctrinae fieri interpretabatur. Nec deterreor tot non minus domesticorum meorum, quam Amicorum undiquaque omnium monitis; hoc solo fine ut tibi inserviam: ut nimirum rerum Hebraicarum cognitio non amplius versetur circa nuda Ritualia; nedum Grammaticalia; set ut ad res ispsas accedatur, earumque cum phrasi & doctrina Novi foederis fiat collatio; si forte hoc etiam medio facilitari queat Judaicae gentis ad fidem Jesu Messiae conversio."

[38] Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*; Richard Popkin, "Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenariaianism;" Webster, *The Great Instauration.*

[39] Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*; eadem, The Hermetic Tradtion in Science."

prelapsarian state, continued to exist even in the pessimistic, dogmatic atmosphere of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation has come under considerable attack. She has been accused, with some justification, of over-generalizing and of making wild extrapolations on the basis of little or no concrete evidence.[40] However, her insights are proving to have more substance that her critics imagined. In terms of both the broad policy of toleration established by Christian August and the activities and attitudes of the people he hired to advise and assist him the Court at Sulzbach can legitimately be described as "Rosicrucian."[41] To understand von Rosenroth's position in such a court it is important to remember that both Jakob Boehme and Rosicrucianism developed in a Lutheran environment largely in reaction to the Lutheran emphasis on divine justice at the expense of human power and potential. Von Rosenroth was indebted to both sources just as they, in turn, were indebted to the Renaissance natural magic tradition.[42]

As we have seen, when Christian August took over as ruler of Sulzbach in 1649, he found himself in a delicate political and religious situation as a Lutheran ruler of a territory legally subject to the higher authority of his fiercely intolerant Catholic cousin, Philipp Wilhelm of Neuburg. Because of the peculiarities of his own situation and on the advice of van Helmont, Christian August developed a kind of private, ecumenical policy that not only included Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, but also extended to separatist groups, radical pietists, and Jews. In 1652, again on the advice of van Helmont, Christian August came to an agreement with his cousin that Catholics as well as Lutherans would be officially allowed to worship in the Sulzbach territories and that all church assets would be divided between the two groups. As we have also seen, in 1655 Christian August took the further decisive step of converting to Catholicism. Christian August's Catholicism was, however, radically different from the intolerant confessionalism of his cousin's and, indeed, from the majority of the Catholics living in the Sulzbach territories because he was willing to accept a broad spectrum of religious beliefs as valid.

The "Rosicrucian" orientation of the Sulzbach Court helps to explain the emphatic and unusual philo-Semitism characteristic of von Rosenroth, van Helmont, and Christian August. As Ernestine van der Wall has pointed out, in most cases Christian philo-Semitism did not extend to Jews as Jews, but only to Jews as potential Christian converts: ". . . philo-Judaism has to be seen in a conversionist light, which at once indicates the limits of their pro-

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[40] Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History;" Hesse, "Hermeticism and Historiography"; Westman and McQuire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution.*

[41] For a description of the ecumenical policy promoted by Christian August, see Jaitner, "Der Pfalz-Sulzbacher Hof in der europäischen Ideengeschichte des 17 Jahrhunderts"; Fincke, "Toleranz und 'Discrete' Frömmigkeit nach 1650: Pfalzgraf Christian August von Sulzbach und Ernst van Hessen-Rheinfels;" Wappmann, *Durchbruch zur Toleranz.*

[42] Edighoffer, *Rose-Croix et société idéale selon Johann Valentin Andreae*; Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentine Andreae (1586-1654), Phoenix of the Theologians*; Gorceix, *La Bible des Rose-Croix. Traduction et Commentaire des trois premiers écrits rosicruciens*

Jewishness: their philo-Judaism was a conditional sympathy."[43] Van der Wall makes the further important point that because many philo-Semites were also mystics and spiritualists who did not care about dogmas and ceremonies, they easily built bridges to other faiths and minimized doctrinal differences. But their ecumenism stopped when it came to the necessity of accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Clearly van der Wall is correct in the case of most philo-Semites, and her analysis would at first appear to apply to the Sulzbach Kabbalists as well. Von Rosenroth makes his conversionist aims clear throughout the *Kabbala denudata*, as well as in his other writings and correspondence. The second part of the *Kabbala denudata* emphasizes von Rosenroth's missionary intent. It begins with a systematic outline of the doctrines in the Zohar, to which von Rosenroth appends parallel passages from the New Testament. The same technique is used in the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, the last treatise in the *Kabbala denudata*, which was written by van Helmont and published separately because of its alleged importance in the task of converting Jews to Christianity. However, a careful reading of these texts reveals that the Christianity proffered to the potential Jewish convert seems far more Jewish than Christian.

In his illuminating article "La Kabbala chrétienne en Allemagne du xvi au xviii siècle," Ernst Benz describes the kind of religious no man's land certain Jews and Christians found themselves in as a result of their esoteric, mystical studies:

> The Kabbalah allowed certain people to accept the idea that kabbalistic prophecies concerning the Messiah found their realization in Jesus Christ; but the Kabbalah is not compatible with the dogmatic formulas of the Church on the subject of the Trinity, because it comprised, with the doctrine of the *Sefirot*, a different interpretation of interdivine life. Thus, it frequently happened that starting from Judaism Jewish Kabbalists took a step towards Christianity; but they never arrived at a complete acceptance of Christian dogma. Inversely, the thinking of Christian Kabbalists, starting from a Christian perspective, often evolved in a manner that led to conflict with the traditional doctrine of their Church and ecclesiastical authorities. In this way, esoteric groups of Jews and Christians found themselves in a frontier region beyond the borders of their respective religions.[44]

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[43] Van der Wall, "The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) and the Anglo-Dutch Circle of Philo-Judaists," p. 73.

[44] Benz, "La Kabbale Chrétienne en Allemagne du xvi au xviii siecle," pp. 111-2: ". . . la Kabbala permet certes d'accepter l'idée que les propheties kabbalistiques au sujet du Messie ont trouvé leur realisation en Jesus-Christ; mais elle n'est pas compatible avec les formules dogmatiques de l'Église au sujet de la Trinité, car elle comporte, avec la doctrine des Sefirot, une interprétation differente de la vie intradivine. Ainsi, les kabbalistes juifs en arrivent fréquement, en partant au judaisme, à faire un pas vers le christianisme; mais ils ne vont jamais jusqu'à l'approbation complète des dogmes chrétiens. Inversement, les kabbalistes chrétiens, partant due christianisme, évoluent bien souvent de manière à entrer en conflict avec la doctrine traditionnelle de leur Église, et parfois aussi avec les autorités ecclesiastiques. C'est ainsi que les groupes esoteriques juifs et chrétiens se retrouvent dans une sorte de zone frontalière à la limite des deux religions."

When analyzed from a Jewish perspective, the kind of inquiring yet critical and ultimately skeptical outlook described here by Benz has been characterized elsewhere as typical of the "Marrano mentality," which arose from the unique experience of Sephardic Jews constrained to live with and encouraged (or forced) to convert to Christianity. Popkin, Petuchowski, Kaplan, Bodian, and others who have written about the "Marrano mentality" contend that the kind of dual allegiance and perspective typical of many Marranos and Conversos[45] contributed to the development of the critical, skeptical attitude that led, first, to a non-dogmatic, essentially non-denominational spirituality and, ultimately, to the secular thinking characteristic of modern western thought.[46] From a Christian perspective, the Reformation produced similar conflicting allegiances in the minds of many Christians, and these conflicts contributed to a similar skeptical and ecumenical outlook. These two mentalities, the "Marrano" and the post-Reformation, radical Christian meet in the thought of the Sulzbach Kabbalists. Van Helmont's and von Rosenroth's experiences in Amsterdam brought them in contact with Christians and Jews of various religious beliefs. But it was their experience with Conversos that put a special stamp on their thought, convincing them that the real difference between Christians and Jews was minimal and easily overcome by the acceptance of their Christianized version of the Kabbalah. While the Sulzbach Kabbalists were all deeply religious, their friendship transcended conventional Christian denominational boundaries. For how else could a Lutheran, a Lutheran turned Catholic, and Catholic turned Quaker/Seeker have otherwise worked together and remained devoted friends? They were, to use Kolakowski's memorable phrase, "Chrétiens sans église," although van Helmont was the only one who clearly recognized this fact.

Knorr's intention in publishing the *Kabbala denudata* was to offer the public a Latin translation of the high points of the most famous kabbalistic work, the Zohar, while providing other kabbalistic treatises and commentaries to help the reader understand this notoriously difficult text.[47] The

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[45] "Marrano" is the term usually applied to those Jews who retained their Judaism when ostensibly converting to Christianity, while "Converso" is the term applied to all Jewish converts in general or to those Jews who gave up their Judaism when they converted. But even Jews who had fully accepted Christianity could still be called Marranos by hostile Christians. See Revah, "Les Marranes"; Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, introduction.

[46] See, for example, Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*; idem, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*; Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*; and J. Petuchowski, *The Theology of Hakam David Nieto*.

[47] Because Knorr felt Christian readers would not be able to understand the Zohar without preliminary preparation, he devoted the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata* (1677) to a cumbersome "Apparatus," composed of explanatory extracts taken from later kabbalistic commentaries. In between his selections from various Kabbalists, especially Lurianic Kabbalists, Knorr also interspersed many similar commentaries, in whole or in part, along with explanatory letters and treatises written by himself and his friends. It is only with the second volume that excerpts from the Zohar appear. From a modern point of view, Knorr seems to have made the Kabbalah more complicated rather than less with the confusing juxtaposition of so many different fragments; but Knorr saw the work as a consistent, self-explanatory whole, revealing as it did the true *prisca theologia*.

publication of the *Kabbala denudata* offers the clearest insight into the motivations behind Knorr's seemingly disparate activities. These were not the actions of a disillusioned recluse, but of a passionately committed activist with a mission to reform the world. For the twentieth century reader it may be difficult to appreciate precisely why Knorr believed that the esoteric writings of Jewish Kabbalah, and particularly the Zohar, like the Bible, offered nothing less than a blue-print of utopia. He was convinced that the Zohar provided answers to all the most perplexing questions of his day, concerning God, the Creation, the angels, the souls, the Messiah, the millennium, hell, the resurrection, virtue, vice, and Scripture.[48] But in addition, the Zohar and the Kabbalah as a whole offered a key to natural philosophy. Like van Helmont, Knorr made no distinction between theology and natural philosophy (or science, as we would call it today).

The Zohar, along with other kabbalistic writings, came to possess the same attractions for Christians as the *Hermetica*, the *Sibylline Prophecies* and the *Orphica*; all were thought to enshrine portions of that ancient, esoteric wisdom God had imparted orally to Adam and Moses and which had culminated in Christianity.[49] Kabbalistic writings were generally thought to be the most important single source for the recovery of this ancient wisdom because, being Jewish and not Pagan in origin, they represented the first and purest source of that divine knowledge. The word "Kabbalah" itself comes from the Hebrew word meaning "that which is received through tradition," and it was generally believed that the Kabbalah had passed orally from one generation to the next until the time of Ezra when it was finally written down.[50] Two of the best known Christian Kabbalists, Pico and Postel, both employed the Kabbalah to show how a single current of truth ran through all philosophies, attaining its profoundest expression in the Christian revelation. Knorr continued this line of reasoning and defends his interest in the Kabbalah on the grounds that it is the spring from which all subsequent philosophy derived. He was convinced that fragments of ancient wisdom existed in the writings of the Kabbalists and that these were passed down from generation to generation, remaining pure and uncorrupted.

> In the Cabalist writings of the Jews I hoped I would be able to discover what remained of the ancient Barbaric-Judaic philosophy. . . . I had no greater wish than that I might be permitted to enjoy the sun itself and its brighter light once all the clouds of obstructions and hindrances were scattered. I scarcely hoped I would be able to catch sight of this light unless I followed in the footsteps of that river and arrived at the spring itself. I believed that I would discover this spring in these very ancient books.[51]

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[48] "Praefatio ad Lectorem," *KD* I, 1:138.

[49] Walker, "Prisca Theologia"; idem, *The Ancient Theology*; C.B. Schmitt, "The Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz."

[50] See Benz, *Die Christliche Kabbala*; Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*; Scholem, "Zur Geschichte der Anfange der Christichen Kabbala"; Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectivies*.

[51] Von Rosenroth, "Amica Responsio," *KD*, I, 2:75, 76: ". . . In Scriptis Judaeorum Cabbalisticis me inventurum sperem, si quid superest Antiquae Philosophiae Barbarico-Judaicae. . .

Knorr and his fellow Kabbalists were convinced that if they could offer convincing proof that essential Christian doctrines were discoverable in the Kabbalah, there would be an end to religious disputes. How could the Jews accept the Kabbalah and deny Christianity if it were shown that the latter was clearly adumbrated in the former? What arguments could pagans bring against the Christian religion once it was proven that Christianity offered the most ancient and authentic of all divine revelations and the ultimate source of all religious philosophy?

In stressing the importance and usefulness of the Kabblah to convert the Jews, Christian Kabbalists touched on a subject which greatly exercised the minds of all Christians. While some Catholics and Protestants no longer required a Jewish role in the Second Coming, this was not true for many others or for the majority of Protestant millenarians.[52] As the Protestant Samuel Hartlib wrote to his friend John Worthington in 1660: "the world may not expect any great happiness before the conversion of the Jews be first accomplished."[53] The New Testament provided the source for this view: "All Israel shall be saved" (Romans, 11: 26); "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John, 10: 16). Pico was particularly impressed with the Kabbalah as a tool for converting the Jews. He called it a "potentissima tela contra lapidem cor Hebraeorum" (a most powerful arrow against the stony hearts of the Jews).[54] Both he and Postel were convinced important Christian doctrines, including that of the Trinity, were discernible in the Kabbalah. By employing the kabbalistic practice of combining and separating letters, they both believed they had proved this.

Knorr and van Helmont were equally certain the Kabbalah provided a potent means for converting the Jews. Knorr argues that it is in the best interests of Christians to become familiar with the Kabbalah and with kabbalistic terminology, for if Christians can prove that the terms and concepts of the Jews' most sacred wisdom support the doctrines of the Christian faith, conversion on a mass scale would undoubtedly follow. Knorr claims that he has himself obtained remarkable results using this method:

> When I thought about the convincing and converting of the Jews, I observed that no small obstacle arose from the fact that they either do not understand our terminology, or equally that they shrink away from it, thinking it strange and absurd. When afterwards, on the contrary, I spoke with them using their own expressions, I always gained their open ears. And I obtained the opportunity to expound to them with the most gentle exposition all the mysteries of

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. [N]ihil magis in votis habui, quam ut dissipatis omnibus obstantium impedimentorum nubilis Sole ipso atque Luce ejusdem clariore, frui mihi liceret; quam aspicere posse vix speravi, nisi ipsorum vestigiis insistens rivulorum horum ductu ipsam persequerer scaturiginem; quam in antiquioribus illis Libris me inventurum adhuc opinor."

[52] See Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*; Toon, ed. *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel.*

[53] *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, p. 250.

[54] Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, p. 348.

> Christianity which had formerly seemed so absurd to them. From which time I perceived that the spirit of many were not so very different from real Christians. Indeed I have heard certain of the most learned Jews say they were astonished that such things were taught by Christians, things they had not even suspected previously in their dreams. From these things I have often eagerly desired that their more profound theology [i.e. the Kabbalah] would become known to many of our faith, and that our rabbinical studies would not come to a standstill in mere grammatical observations, or even at their best in the investigation of profane antiquity; by which means at length the Jews would be able to read our writings and gradually be drawn back into the way of truth.[55]

The same rationale led van Helmont to write the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*. At the onset of the dialogue, the Jewish Kabbalist makes it clear to the Christian philosopher that however much Christians urge Jews to convert, this will not happen as long as the way in which Christians and Jews express their doctrines are so radically different. He wonders if his Christian friend could explain Christian doctrine in kabbalistic terms. The Christian proceeds to do exactly this for the remainder of the dialogue, but in doing so he undermines basic Christian concepts and produces an idiosyncratic and unorthodox form of Christianity, as we shall see.

The attempt to make Christianity less offensive to Jews had been the ostensible goal of many Christians concerned with their conversion long before the publication of the *Kabbala denudata*. Pico, Reuchlin, Postel, La Peyrère, and other Christian Hermeticists and Kabbalists had from the Renaissance onwards emphasized the compatibility of Judaism and Christianity largely by minimizing or ignoring the very real doctrinal differences and appealing to a *prisca theologia* common to all religions. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries radical Protestant philo-Semites tried a new tactic to convert Jews as well. Rejecting Catholic tradition, they offered Jews the promise of a return to the apostolic past of early Jewish-Christianity stripped of the more offensive doctrines of the incarnation, the resurrection, and what they considered to be the later spurious and divisive teachings on original sin, eternal punishment, the Trinity, and predestination. The problem was, how could one find out exactly what apostolic Jewish-Christianity was? This required delving into Jewish sources to discover the customs and beliefs of early Jewish-Christians. These investigations provided the rationale for those

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[55] Von Rosenroth, "Amica Responsio," *KD*, I, 2: 74: "Cum de convincendis atque convertendis Judaeis meditatus sum, non parvum exinde observavi oboriri impedimentum, quod illi terminos nostros vel non intelligant, vel tanquam insolitos, atque absurdos abhorreant; cum e contrario postquam ipsorum phrasibus cum ipsis loquerer, patulas semper habuerim aures, occasionemque nactus sim, omnia Christianismi mysteria, quae tam absurda hactenus ipsis visa fuerant, mollissima interpretatione ipsis proponere: ex quo tempore multorum animos a vero Christianismo non usque adeo persensi alienos. Imo quosdam doctissimorum admiratos audivi, talia a Christianis doceri quae hactenus ipsi ne per somnium quidem suspicati. Unde saepius exoptavi; ut intimior ipsorum Theologia pluribus nostratium innotesceret & studia nostra Rabbinica non in nudis haererent observationibus Grammaticis, vel si summa fuerint, Antiquitatum profanarum indagatione; quo tandem & scripta nostra illi legere possent & ita pedetentim ad veritatis iter reducerentur."

Christians, such as the Sabbatarians, who embraced Jewish customs.[56] To their Christian critics, the Sabbatarians provided a cautionary example of how delving into Jewish sources could undermine Christian beliefs and create "Judaizers."

At the same time that Protestants were trying to reconstruct Jewish-Christianity, they tried to convince the Jews that their own later tradition of Rabbinic Judaism based on the Talmud was, like Catholic tradition, a spurious addition. New Christians, or Conversos, were attracted by this vision of a common meeting ground. The attraction of New Christians to a simplified, rationalized Christianity was paralleled by the efforts made by New Christian and Marrano converts back to Judaism to simplify their ancestral religion. What is interesting about the Sulzbach Kabbalists is that their appeal to the Jews to convert and to Christians to unite combines the Renaissance *prisca theologia* tradition with the radical Protestant appeal for a return to simplified apostolic Jewish-Christianity. Knorr emphasizes the importance of publishing the principle kabbalistic text, the Zohar, for this very reason:

> Because I suspected that so great a separation of Christian religions arose from no other cause than from such great diversity among Christians of philosophical principles and metaphysical definitions, which constitute, as it were, the left hand of theology (because many confess that philosophy is the servant of theology), it immediately occurred to me that I should hunt out that same ancient philosophy which flourished at the time of Christ and the Apostles and which appears to have flowed from the stream of the sacred oracles. As I was about to examine those ancient opinions about God and other spiritual and theological matters, I fell upon this most ancient book of the Jews, which is called the Sohar, or Book of Splendor. Although I might seem to assail the antiquity of this work on account of its modern division into chapters, nevertheless, I discovered that the chapters themselves and teachings, which ought rather to be called fragments, are ancient enough and amply set forth the most ancient opinions and hypotheses. Not having, therefore, been frightened away by the incredible difficulty of the style or by the very abstruse covering of enigmas with which it teemed, I entered the path, worn by few, traversed by no one I knew, and, furthermore, filled with so many hard stones, uneven places, chasms, precipices, and such mud that it is not surprising that so many, filled with dread, abandoned it with disgust. Nevertheless, I pressed on. Nor to this day have I succumbed to the tediousness of the journey. I shall sketch for you in a few words what gold and whatever gems I have thus far dug out of this dirt and what hope leads me further.[57]

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[56] Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*; Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England.*

[57] *KD* I, 2: 3-4: "Caeterùm, cum tanta Religionum Christianarum divortia non aliunde orta esse suspicarer, quam à tanta Principiorum Philosophicorum, definitionumque Metaphysicarum inter Christianos diversitate, quae omnia tamen sinistram quasi Theologiae manum constituunt, cum plerique fateantur, Philosophiam esse Theologiae famulam: Illicò mentem subiit, illam ipsam indagare Philosophiae antiquitatem, quae ipsius etiam Christi & Apostolorum tempore viguit, & è cujus scaturigine quicquid ferè est Sacrorum oraculorum fluxisse videtur. Scrutaturus igitur antiquas illas de Deo, caeterisque quaestionibus Pneumaticis atque Theologicis opiniones, in antiquissimum illum Judaeorum librum incidi quem Sohar, seu splendorum appellant; cujus antiquitatem, quamvis ob recentiorem captiulorum ejus

When Knorr complains of the tediousness of his work and describes the difficulties he has experienced in separating the few kabbalistic gems and nuggets of gold from all the remaining rubbish, one suspects that his protestations do not really represent his own views but were designed to forestall the criticisms of Christian anti-Semites, just as in other places he attempts to forestall the criticisms of Jews. The Sulzbach Kabbalists did find themselves caught at times between the two. An especially harsh attack was directed at Knorr by Herman Rose in a letter written before the publication of the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata*. Rose had been at University with Knorr. When he visited his old friend in Sulzbach, he was extremely distressed to find Knorr absorbed in the theory of the pre-existence of souls. He questions Knorr's orthodoxy and accuses him of running after "Jews, Calvinists, Grotius, and Nestorians" and accepting the errors of the Chiliasts.[58] Rose clearly thought that instead of converting Jews to Christianity, Knorr's kabbalistic studies were drawing him to Judaism.

The belief that Christianity was implicit in the Jewish Kabbalah was the assumption of a long line of Jews who had converted for precisely that reason.[59] In 1280 Abraham Abulafia claimed that some of his students converted because they had applied the kabbalistic practice of transposing letters to the phrase "I sit in the shade to which I aspire" (Song of Songs) in such a way that they came up with the phrases "I love his cross" or "in the shadow of the crucified one."[60] Alfonse de Valladolid (Abner of Burgos) explicitly refers to the Kabbalah in discussing his own conversion in 1320. He maintained the doctrine of the Incarnation was implicit in the concept of the *Shehkinah*, and he identified *Metatron*[61] of the Kabbalah with Jesus on the grounds that some thirteenth century Kabbalists had interpreted *Metatron* to mean "envoy." Although orthodox Jews began to argue strongly against this

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compilationem oppugnari viderem, ipsa tamen capitula atque tradita, quae fragmenta potiùs dicenda sunt, antiqua satis esse, & antiquissimas explicare opiniones atque hypotheses abundè reperi. Non absterritus igitur incredibili styli ejus difficultate, nec abstrusissimis aenigmatum quibus scatet involucris, viam ingressus sum paucis tritam, à nemine, quod sciam, emensam, caeterum tot scrupis, salebris, voraginibus, praecipitiis, tantoque coeno refertam, ut mirum non sit quin plerique inevitabili territi fastidio, eam deseruerint. Insisto tamen, nec hactenus itineris taedio succubui, atque adeo paucis Tibi delineabo, quod aurum, quasque gemmas ex his sordibus jamjam eruerim, & quae me spes ducat ulteriùs."

[58] Rose's letter was written on December 29, 1675. It was published in *Acta litteraria ex manuscriptis eruta atque collecta cura B.G. Stuvii*, VII (Jena, 1710), pp. 80-82. Finke and Hanschur quote from it in "Christian Knorrs von Rosenroth Lebenslauf," p. 42, n. 26. For other criticisms, see the less than enthusiastic reaction to the *Kabbala denudata* on the part of Christians like Johann Jacob Schudt (*Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten*), Johann Christoph Wagenseil (*Benachrichtingungen wegen einiger die Judenschafft angehende wichtigen Sachen*), Johann Andrea Eisenmenger (*Entdecktes Judenthums*), the Jewish convert Peter Späth, who became known as Moses Germanus (letter to van Helmont, Hamburg, Staatsbibliothek, Suppellex. ep., v. 26, pp. 67ff.), and von Rosenroth's description of the reaction of the Jewish community in general (*KD*, II, 1: 18-19).

[59] Benz discusses these converts in "Kabbalists Chrétiens."

[60] This helps to explain Abulafia's aversion for the theosophical Kabbalah. See Idel, *Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*.

[61] Metatron was traditionally thought to be the patriarch Enoch transformed into an angel (Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 60).

kind of Christian interpretation, even going as far as to argue that Christians were simply bad Kabbalists, who had derived such doctrines as the Trinity from a misunderstanding of the Kabbalah,[62] the practice continued. As Benz points out, Pico learned about the Kabbalah from the New Christian Flavius Mithridates. In 1512 Abraham Farisol, author of the anti-Christian polemic *The Shield of Abraham* described how Jewish converts to Christianity employed the idiom of the Zohar and other kabbalistic texts to justify the incarnation of God, his nativity, and resurrection. He pointed out that on the basis of the doctrine of the emanation of the *sefirot* Christians could argue that Jews already accepted the idea of multiplicity in God and that therefore the doctrine of the Trinity should not prove a stumbling block to conversion.

Farisol's point is well taken for the very good reason that Judaism and Christianity were both profoundly influenced by Neoplatonism, which described creation in terms of emanation from The One and encouraged the idea that this emanation occurred through triads or "Trinities." In explaining how The One became the many, Plotinus introduced the concept of the three *Hypostases*, a Greek term interpreted as meaning "origin," "substance," "real nature" or "first principle." According to Plotinus' formulation in his great work *The Enneads*, the first of these *Hypostases* was The One (*to hen*), the second, Intellect or Mind (*Nous*) and the third, Soul (*psuche*) (*Enneads* 5.1.) While Plotinus saw these as three separated entities, each one emanating from the previous one, Proclus tended to abolish any absolute distinction between them and "telescope" them into one. Christians were happy to see prefigurations of the Trinity in these triadic formulations (Proclus was especially helpful in this respect), and, indeed, it has been suggested that Neoplatonic philosophy helped Christian theologians formulate the doctrine of the Trinity. Such triads made their way into Judaism and Islam through the infiltration of Neoplatonic ideas, thus opening the way for Trinitarian interpretations of these rival religions by proselytizing Christians. The similarity of certain motifs in Christianity and Judaism can therefore be attributed in part to the influence of Neoplatonism, but it was also a result of the interaction between Judaism and Christianity and their mutual borrowing.[63]

Ernestine van der Wall has shown that the philo-Semitic millenarians in mid-seventeenth century Amsterdam were well aware of the usefulness of the Kabbalah in converting Jews. In October, 1647, for example, Johann Morian wrote to Hartlib, lamenting the fact that there were so few Christians expert in the Kabbalah. Morian thinks that Christians should pay someone to study the Kabbalah and publish his findings with the conversion of the Jews

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[62] Benz gives the example of Profiat Duran, who argued in 1397 that Christians had obtained their doctrine of the Trinity from a misunderstanding of the Kabbalah.

[63] See for example, Liebes, *Studies in the* Zohar and Elliot Wolfson, "The Tree That Is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*." For the influence of Neoplatonism on the development of the Kabbalah, particularly the concept of the *sefirot* and the manipulation of Hebrew letters, see Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance."

specifically in mind. He proposes that Boreel take on this important task.[64] The arrival of Rabbi Nathan Shapira, a renowned Kabbalist, in Amsterdam in 1657 reinforced the belief among Christian millenarians that the Kabbalah was indeed a "potentissima tela contra lapidem cor Hebraeorum," as Pico had described it centuries before.[65] Popkin has described how Shapira was willing to recognize Jesus as the Messiah because he subscribed to the Lurianic view that the spirit of the Messiah reappeared at different times in history.[66] Shapira further encouraged Christian millenarians to believe the gulf between Christians and Jews was not so great by asserting, first, that Kabbalists believed Isaiah 53 actually did refer to the Messiah and, second, that Jews could accept the Sermon on the Mount as the authentic teachings of the Rabbis.[67] As Popkin points out, Shapira's remarks left Serrarius convinced that Shapira was "almost" a Christian, while Dury concluded that the conversion of the Jews was imminent. Van Helmont, of course, shared their view that the Kabbalah offered a powerful means to convert the Jews. After Boreel's death, he may have therefore been designated as the one to take on the task Morian had allotted to Boreel. His meeting with von Rosenroth, who was well grounded in Hebrew, Syriac, and Aramaic, would then have been additionally fortuitous.

Von Rosenroth and van Helmont do not have the Jews alone in mind when they stress the value of the Kabbalah in restoring religious harmony. They also believed that the breach between Catholics and Protestants could be healed through the Kabbalah. Knorr attributed the discord among the Christians to their reliance on pagan, and particularly Greek, philosophy:

> As often as I lamented that detestable discord within the Church (it is possible to show that these evils have arisen chiefly from that begetter of dissention, our pagan philosophy), I thought that at some time or other a way could be found to bring back the divided Churches into Christian accord.[68]

Unlike Pico, Knorr did not think the ancient and divine wisdom of the Kabbalah has passed intact into the supposedly later writings of Plato, the Neoplatonists, and the fragmentary remains of Greek and Hellenic mysticism comprising the *prisca theologia*. In Knorr's view the Greeks corrupted and distorted the limpid stream of Jewish wisdom, and these distortions had a baneful influence on Christians. By returning to the original source of Christianity, the Kabbalah, Christians would circumvent the errors of the Greeks and once again unite in a single faith. In his hostility towards Greek philos-

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[64] Van der Wall, "Johann Stephen Rittangel's Stay in the Dutch Republic."

[65] Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, p. 348.

[66] Popkin, "Rabbi Nathan Shapira's Visit to Amsterdam in 1657," p. 194.

[67] Van der Wall, "The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) and the Anglo-Dutch Circle of Philo-Judaists."

[68] Von Rosenroth, "Amica Responsio," *KD*, I, 2: 75: ". . . quotiescunque detestandam illam Ecclesiarum discordiam dolui, cujus mala potissimum ab ista dissensiionum seminatrice Philosophia nostra Gentili exorta esse, facillime demonstrari posset; viam quoque mediantibus his studis inveniri posse quandoque censui ad condordiam Christianam in distractas reducendam Ecclesias. . . ."

ophy, Knorr followed in the tradition of those who, like La Boderie, Champier and Mornay, accepted the truth of Juvenal's phrase "Graecia mendax" and condemned the Greeks for being over eloquent, subtle, and elaborate. This tradition had a long history, going back to Virgil.[69]

For van Helmont and Knorr the way back to the Garden of Eden lay through the Kabbalah. Van Helmont had said as much ten years before in his *Alphabet of Nature*, where he described the religious, social, and even scientific benefits that would be derived from the accurate understanding of the Hebrew language. By the time the *Kabbala denudata* was published, van Helmont's knowledge of kabbalistic ideas had deepened, and he believed he had ever greater reason to value the Kabbalah. Both he and Knorr were convinced the Kabbalah offered the key to an ecumenical Christian religion which was superior to all others because it alone had the capacity to 1) unite all men in a single belief; 2) offer a theodicy which truly justified the ways of God to man by fully explaining the existence of evil and sin; 3) answer the questions raised by the philosophers, particularly those posed by Descartes concerning the relationship between mind and body, spirit and matter; and 4) provide men with such an accurate understanding of the natural world that they would be able to repair the damage done by the Fall and restore the earth to its prelapsarian state. These are substantial claims with important scientific and millenarian implications.

In their basic aim of using the Kabbalah to convert the Jews and pagans while uniting Christians, Knorr and van Helmont employed traditional arguments used by Christians to defend their interest in the Kabbalah. The kabbalistic ideas they apply to this end, were new, however, and came largely from a body of kabbalistic writings originating after the Renaissance, during the sixteenth century among the disciples of Isaac Luria.[70]

Luria was born in Jerusalem of German parents in 1534 and died an acclaimed "zaddik," or holy man, in 1572. Luria's death during a plague epidemic at the age of 38 presented a problem for his disciples because in Judaism an early death was considered divine punishment for a grave sin. It was suggested that Luria's sin lay in revealing divine secrets to his disciples, a notion that only served to enhance his reputation. Aside from one book Luria left only a few fragmentary writings. When asked why he wrote so little, he admitted that he was incapable of presenting his ideas in written form because every time he picked up his pen he was overcome by visions too complex to channel through a slender quill: "It is impossible, because all things are interrelated. I can hardly open my mouth to speak without feeling as though the sea burst its dams and overflowed. How then shall I express what my souls has received, and how can I put it down in a book?"[71] Consequently, what is known about him and his teachings comes from his

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[69] Walker, "*Prisca Theologia.*"

[70] Scholem, *MTJM*, ch. 7. The following discussion of the Lurianic Kabbalah is based on the works of Scholem, Dan, Idel, Tishby, and Liebes cited in the bibliography, as well as on the Lurianic treatises included in the *Kabbala denudata.*

[71] Scholem, *MTJM*, p. 254; see also idem, "Isaac Luria," *Encyclopedia Judaica.*.

disciples. It is therefore difficult to distinguish Luria's ideas from theirs, and, in fact, several versions of his teachings exist. The most authentic account of his philosophy is found in the manuscripts written by Hayim Vital (1543-1620), who was with Luria at Safed. Knorr valued these manuscripts highly:

> If anyone reads the writings of Luria of Germany by R. Chajim Vital, which were brought not long ago from the east to these shores (a great number are still said to exist there), a very great light will shine on him.[72]

Knorr accepted less authentic versions of Luria's thought as well, particularly those from the Neoplatonized version of Luria's philosophy that appeared in the works of the Italian Jew Israel Sarug.[73] The *Kabbala denudata* also contains excerpts from Kabbalists who were not followers of Luria, but Knorr clearly thought that these were less interesting and important.[74] His bias in favor of the Lurianic Kabbalah is obvious. About one fourth of the *Kabbala denudata*, or three hundred pages, is devoted to the writings of Luria's disciples.

The Lurianic Kabbalah is distinct from that of earlier writers. Instead of concentrating on cosmology and explanations of creation, Luria stresses the redemption and millennium. Gershom Scholem has explained Luria's preoccupation with redemption on historical grounds as an attempt to make religious and philosophical sense of the Jews' traumatic expulsion from Spain in 1492.[75] Luria made exile a central notion in his theology; it was the

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[72] Von Rosenroth, "Lectori Philebraeo Salutem!," *KD* II, 1: 9-10: "si quis autem habere potest Tractatus manuscriptos R. Jizachak Lorjensis Germani, conscriptos a R. Chajim Vital, & haut ita pridem ex oriente in has plagas allatos, quorum ibidem magus adhuc extare dicitur numerus; illi demum lumen affulgebit longe majus." Knorr proudly says that he has obtained Vital's major work, עץ החיים (The Tree of Life), and he lists the six books and the various tractates contained in each (*KD*, II, 1: 9-16).

[73] Knorr included a work of one of Sarug's students, Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Puerto del Cielo* (*The Gate of the Heaven*), written originally in Spanish and translated into the Hebrew version (*Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*), which Knorr used and abridged.

[74] For instance, Knorr used Cordovero's *The Garden of Pomegranates* in the "Apparatus" (*KD*, I, 1), although he says of it, "quamvis studium istius eo usque non ascendit quo pertigit R. Jizachak Loriensis" ("Lectori Philebraeo Salutem!" *KD*, II, 1: 9). Cordovero and Luria were the two major Kabbalists of the sixteenth century. Knorr also included Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah* (*Gates of Light*); an Italian work on alchemy, *Esh ha-Mezaref*, which is only preserved in the extracts translated by von Rosenroth; and selections from Naphtali Bacharach's *Emek ha-Melek* (*The Valley of the King*).

[75] Scholars disagree about the effect the expulsion had in shaping the Lurianic Kabbalah. While Scholem argues that the impact was decisive, Idel disagrees and stresses the continuity of Lurianic Kabbalah with earlier Kabbalah (*Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, see especially the last chapter; idem, "Encounters between Spanish and Italian Kabbalists in the Generation of the Expulsion," pp. 197; idem, "Religion, Thought and Attitudes: The Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews," p. 129). Hacker agrees with Idel ("The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries"). But as Schwartz has written: "While there is currently a scholarly debate about the extent of the impact of the expulsion in the mystical theories of the Ari [Isaac Luria], this event, which took place only thirty years before his birth, cannot be ignored. For the myth of the Ari proposes that there was a divine purpose behind the exiles that have haunted Jewish history, and that the Jews are the chosen people in the sense that they were created to search for and raise up the scattered sparks" ("The Mythology of Judaism," p. 23). Tirosh-Samuelson also finds evidence of the trauma of expulsion in Sephardic literature ("The Ultimate End of Human Life in Post Expulsion Philosophic Literature"), as does Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*. For various

necessary and preliminary stage in a process of universal redemption that occurred through the transmigration of souls.

The doctrine of transmigration is the pivot around which Luria builds his philosophy and explains both the creation and the ultimate redemption of all things. This was the aspect of his philosophy that most appealed to van Helmont and Knorr. They came to believe the doctrine of transmigration offered the surest foundation for a universal Christian Church.

In Lurianic thought exile was both a prerequisite to creation and the cause of evil and sin. Luria reasons that in order for there to be a place for the world, God had to withdraw from a part of himself. This doctrine of *tzimtzum* (withdrawal) was both profound and ambiguous.[76] It provided a symbol of exile in the deepest sense, within the divinity itself, but it also implied that evil was intrinsic to the creation process and not attributable to man alone. Luria elaborated on two earlier kabbalistic doctrines, "the breaking of the vessels" (*shevirath-ha-kelim*) and *tikkun* (restoration) to show that evil and sin are the temporary products of disorder.

According to the complex mythology of the Lurianic Kabbalah, after God withdrew from himself, traces of light were left in the void. These traces were formed into the image of the primordial man, *Adam Kadmon*, who was thus the first manifested configuration of the divine. However, at this point a catastrophe occurred. Further divine lights burst forth from *Adam Kadmon*, but the "vessels" meant to contain them shattered. This myth was of prime importance in the Lurianic Kabbalah because it explained the necessity of exile and modified its horrors by integrating it within a scheme of universal redemption. With "the breaking of the vessels" evil came into the world and souls became sunk in matter—or, as Luria more poetically explains it: the shattered pieces of the broken vessels fell down and became the dregs of the material world, while the purest and most divine parts of the lights of the *sefirot* (which these vessels were meant to contain) fled back to the heavens. Some sparks of light, however, fell with the vessels and became immersed in matter; these were the souls in exile.[77]

Luria explains why souls became trapped and exiled in a material realm in another way as well. Taking the figure of *Adam Kadmon*, he describes in anatomical detail how all the souls of every living creature are contained within his body, appointing different souls to his eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and limbs.[78] When *Adam Kadmon* sinned by eating from the tree of good and

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opinions favoring one position or the other, see the works cited in the bibliography of Fine, Dan, Kiener, Rosenberg, Werblowsy, and Wolfson. For an overview, see Tirosh-Samuelson, "Review Essay: Continuity and Revision in the Study of the Kabbalah."

[76] The concept of *tzimtzum*, while adumbrated in early Kabbalah, was greatly elaborated in Cordovero and Luria. Liebes contends that the idea of *tzimtzum* had been developed in Safed before Luria's arrival (*Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, pp. 65-92, 175-6).

[77] Scholem, *MTJM*, pp. 265ff.

[78] Vital, "Concerning the Revolutions of Souls," *KD*, II, 2:248: ". . .nempe omnes mentes & spiritus & psychae nulla excepta comprehensae fuerint in Adamo protoplaste cum conderetur; ita ut quaedam animae pertinerent ad caput Adami; quaedam ad oculos ejus; quaedam ad ipsius nasum, & sic porro ad omnia ejus membra, a quibus quasi dependebant."

evil, he confounded the two realms, mixing light with darkness, souls with matter.[79]

The work of restoration (*tikkun*) involved freeing these sparks, or souls, from their exiled state, trapped in material prisons, and reuniting them with the divine light. The most revolutionary aspect of the Lurianic Kabbalah is found in the emphasis Luria places on the role of man in the process of restoration. For it is only through human actions that the souls, trapped among the shards of broken vessels, can be reunited with the divine light. Luria interpreted history as a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil, in which each successive generation from Adam up to the present participates in the process of *tikkun*. Each time a Jew sins, more souls fall into the abyss, but with each good deed souls are freed. For Luria this mythic struggle between good and evil is played out by the same cast of characters, who experience repeated reincarnations (*gilgul*) until they become perfect.[80] But although the process of *tikkun* will be long and arduous, restoration will eventually occur as each exiled being moved up the ladder of creation, becoming morally better and increasingly spiritual until finally freed from the cycle of rebirth. Luria transformed mysticism into an activist historical force, through which Kabbalists engaged in a cosmic drama of universal salvation. They could not retreat into their own private world and bemoan the loss of an ideal past. Their job was to repair that loss and restore the world to pristine perfection.[81] This kabbalistic vision had much in common with Hermeticism and alchemy, all contributing factors to what Frances Yates has described as "the Rosicrucian Enlightenment."

Luria was an animist. He believed that everything was alive and full of souls: "There is nothing in the world. . . which does not possess a certain life, a spiritual nature, a particular planet and its perfect form in the heavens."[82] As a result of repeated transmigrations, every soul would even-

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[79] ibid., pp. 359-361.

[80] Scholem, "Gilgul: The Transmigration of Souls." Dan argues that the Lurianic Kabbalah is "the most profound expression in Judaism of an extreme dualistic world-view" ("Jewish Gnosticism," p. 326), but this is not the way that van Helmont and his fellow Christian Kabbalists interpreted it. And even Dan remarks that at the end of the process of *tikkun*, evil will vanish: "When the Process is complete and evil is empty of such captive sparks, it will simply crumble and vanish out of existence for lack of substance" (*Jewish Mysticism & Jewish Ethics*, p. 99). On this issue see Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, pp. 6, 167 n. 160.

[81] The importance of human activity in maintaining the universe did not originate with Luria but he certainly emphasized it. The idea is found in Proverbs 10: 25 ("The Righteous one is the foundation of the world"), in the Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 12b ("The earth stands on one pillar named Righteous, as it is written: 'The righteous one is the foundation of the world'"), and in the zoharic tractate *Idra Rabba* (Tishby: 1: 158), when Rabbai Simeon b. Yohai exclaims, "I do not ask the heavens to listen, not do I ask the earth to give ear, for we are the world's support." In *Gates of Light*, which Knorr included in the *KD*, Gikatilla also emphasizes the power the holy man, or *Zaddiq*, has to affect the cosmos (Gikatilla, *Gates*, pp. 60ff.; this is translated in *KD* I, 1: 660). On Luria's elaboration of this earlier theme, see Arthur Green, "The Zaddiq as *Axis Mundi* in Later Judaism" and Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism & Jewish Ethics*, pp. 99-100.

[82] *KD* II, 3: 415: ". . . nihil in mundo est. . . cui non sit vita quaedam, & natura spiritualis, & planeta sua, atque praefectus in supernus."

tually be redeemed. A later Kabbalist describes Luria's theory that souls rise up the ladder of creation, becoming better and better until finally freed from the cycle of life and rebirth:

> And God gradually raises these [souls fallen under the power of matter] from step to step. In the process of *Gilgul*, he first brings them to life as stones, and from there as plants, from there as animals, and from there as pagans and slaves, and from there as Jews.[83]

Luria's discussion of souls is a complex elaboration of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and even Arabic divisions. A perfect human being, the apex of creation, would possess five souls, three of these correspond to the Platonic and Aristotelian vegetative, animal and rational souls: *nephesch* (the sensitive or vegetative soul); *ruach* (the spirit or animal soul); *neschamah* (*mens* or the rational soul). The purpose and place of the remaining two souls is difficult to understand. The seem to have more in common with the acquired intellect of the Arab philosophers, entering an individual from outside, and were called *chajah* and *jechidah*. To obtain all these souls and attain redemption, each individual had to fulfill the 613 commandments of the Hebrew Bible. Only very few souls were able to do this in the course of one lifetime; the majority had to be born again and again until they finally did.[84]

Luria did not shy away from the idea of animal metempsychosis, but expressly says that a man may become an animal or even a vegetable if his behavior in his previous life has been brutish or vegetal:

> There are few men who are able to avoid revolution in some animal or vegetable, and similarly in some other creature of the world. For which reason everyone is compelled to undergo his punishment in both body and soul because he is brought into a certain bodily state in order that he might be able to feel those pains which he merits. And all things happen according to the nature of the sin.[85]

Hayim Vital maintained that Luria was able to recognize these debased souls. He gives an amusing example of Luria pointing to a waterfall and identifying a deceased acquaintance noted for his malevolent tongue.[86]

Transmigration was not always downwards. Souls could raise themselves up the ladder of creation both through their own efforts and with the assistance of stronger and better souls. Once again one sees how important

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[83] Josef Salomo Delmedigo, quoted in Scholem, "Seelewanderung und Sympathie der Seelen in der judischen Mystik" (hereafter "Seelenwanderung"), p. 103: "'und Gott hebt sie allmahlich von Stufe zu Stufe; zuerst bringst er sie in *Gilgul* in Gestein, von dort in Pflanzen, von dort in Tiere, von dort in Heiden und Sklaven, uns von dort in Israeliten."

[84] Vital, "Concerning the Revolutions of Souls," *KD*, II, 3: 244-478, passim.

[85] ibid., p. 417: "pauci sunt homines, qui evitare queant, ne revolvantur in animal quoddam, vel bestiam, vel avem, vel in animatum quoddam, vel vegetabile aliquod; & sic similiter in aliquam mundi creaturam. Qua ratione quilibet poenam suam sustinere cogitur, quoad corpus & quoad Psychem: quoniam in statum corporeum deducendus est, ut sentire queat dolores illos commeritos. Et omnia quidem pro natura peccatorum."

[86] ibid., p. 375: "Et hoc ipso tempore nostro homo quidam maledicae linguae revolutus fuit & mutatus in torrentuem rapidum, eumque agnovit Magister meus bonae memoriae, quod ibi revolutus esset; & scivit quisnam esset."

human actions are in the process of *tikkun*. This way of thinking led Luria to invest the Jewish dietary laws with new importance. In the very act of eating and drinking, an individual was performing a sacred duty that affected the fate of numerous souls:

> he who is a wise disciple and eats his food with proper attention is able to elevate and restore many revolving souls. Whoever is not attentive will not only restore nothing, but he will sustain damages.[87]

The belief that the souls in food could be elevated through the gustative attentions of wise and pious men convinced Luria that an idiot should be forbidden meat since he could not hope to elevate it.[88]

There was one other way in which one soul could assist another. Through the Lurianic doctrine of *ibbur* it was believed that a soul could become "pregnant" with another soul which had been sent to strengthen it and help it fill a particular commandment. There were "families," or "roots," of souls, each of whose members were required to help those less fortunate and virtuous by revolving with them:

> From this you may understand what is found in the book of the Cabbalists: namely that a certain person had come by revolution into another person, although it may seem absurd to the understanding that an excellent man was compelled to come back and be revolved, especially when by returning in such a revolution he was revolved in a man who was much worse than he had been before. But, indeed, the matter is thus: since all 613 soul sparks are surety and security for each other (by the fact that they are from one root), at some time or other a certain spark, perhaps very small, is bound by this promise to another (since it is from the same root) in order that it may help and perfect it.[89]

The Lurianic Kabbalah provided the Jews with an optimistic philosophy during a particularly trying period in their history. With his belief in the transmigration of souls, Luria justified the suffering of his contemporaries in terms of a future time when every soul would return from exile and share in the joys of the millennium. Luria's doctrine of transmigration vindicated God's ways to men. By attributing the inequalities, misfortunes, and horrors of life to the faults of previous existences, he reaffirmed a belief in God's goodness and justice. Human beings were responsible for their own sin and

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[87] *KD*, II, 3: 419: "quocunq; tempore: hinc qui discipulus sapientum sic est, dibosq; suos comedit debita attentione: elevare & restituere potest multas animas revolutas. Qui vero non attentus est, ille non tantum nihil restituit, sed damnis quoq; afficitur ab illis."

[88] ibid., p. 416: "vetitum ipsi sit, manducare carnem, quia ne unum quidem gradum elevare potest." On the subject of eating, swallowing, and devouring as a metaphor of the *unio mystica*, see Ideal, Kabbalah, pp. 70ff.; Louis Jacobs, "Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought."

[89] ibid., p. 261: "exinde quoque intelliges, quod reperitur in libro Cabbalistarum: Aliquem per revolutionem venisse in alium quendam; cum tamen absurdem videatur intellectue, virum illum excellentem coactum fuisse reverti atque revolvi; & praecipue reditu tali revolutivo, ut revolvatur in homine multum viliore, quam ille fuisset antea. Verum etiam vero res ita se habet; quoniam omnes sexcentae & tredecim scintillae sponsores sunt atque vades pro se invicem, (eo quod ab una radice sunt); hinc aliquando scintilla excellens admondum revolvitur in scintilla quadam vel minima; eo quod vadimonio obstricta sit alteri, cum sit de radice ejus; ut nempe opituletur ei, eamque perficiat."

suffering; but God was lenient and granted every soul the necessary time and assistance to complete the arduous process of repentance and restoration.

Knorr and van Helmont were deeply influenced by this optimistic aspect of the Lurianic Kabbalah. The millennial vision of a future time when every particle of matter would be restored to its pristine spiritual condition provided von Rosenroth and van Helmont with the basis for a truly convincing theodicy. For if evil, sin, and suffering could be shown to be merely temporary stages in a preordained drama of universal redemption, then God would be proven to be both just and merciful. There would be no conflict among the divine attributes. Consequently, the emphasis on divine justice at the expense of divine mercy, characteristic of orthodox Lutheran and Calvinist theology, would be tempered, and the doctrine of predestination would lose its terrifying aspect.

The Lurianic doctrine of reincarnation solved another important problem for the Sulzbach Kabbalists, namely, how Christianity as an historical religion could be considered relevant to all men at all times. For even though Christ had lived at one specific time, all men would have a chance to believe in him during one or more of their reincarnations. Without the doctrine of reincarnation, the Scriptures could not say of Christ, "He tasted death for every man."[90] The problem of the "virtuous pagans," which had bothered people from the rise on Christianity onwards, had found a solution in the Lurianic doctrine of the transmigration of souls.[91]

In addition to providing the basis for a convincing theodicy with the potential for making Christianity a religion of universal appeal, the Lurianic Kabbalah provided a solution to the dilemma of Cartesian dualism. As we have seen, van Helmont and von Rosenroth accepted the idea that matter and spirit were aspects of a single continuum, an idea acquired from their immersion in Renaissance Neoplatonism, alchemy, and the Lurianic Kabblah. Paracelsian and Helmontian medical theory held that mind and matter interacted to the point that disturbed, unhappy thoughts could generate physical disease. The elder van Helmont argued even more radically that man, as the image of God, shares God's ability to influence external things by thought alone. For the elder van Helmont, as well as for those contemporaries and predecessors who subscribed to Renaissance natural magic, the connection between thought and creation began at the beginning when God created the world; and the link connecting thought with things was language. As we saw in the previous chapter, van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*, with it Neoplatonic and kabbalistic sources, made this same connection: letters are the intermediaries between thought and things; they are at one and the same time physical and spiritual or mental. When von Rosenroth and van Helmont looked at the diagrams of the Hebrew letters drawn by van Helmont to accompany his treatise, they had additional proof that mind and matter could not possibly be separated.

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[90] Van Helmont, *Two Hundred Queries*, p. 25.

[91] See Capéran, *Le Problème du Salut des Infidès*; Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*

Knorr and van Helmont found the doctrines of the Lurianic Kabbalah and the teachings of the Christian faith wholly compatible. The greatest stumbling block in the way of the mass conversion of the Jews was, they believed, their resistance to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and their refusal to accept Christ as the Messiah. On the basis of the Lurianic Kabbalah, they were convinced the Jews would come to accept both these fundamental points. They were convinced the concept of the Trinity was clearly outlined in Luria's description of the ten *sefirot*. While the particular parallel they drew between the three members of the Trinity and the ten *sefirot* was novel, the conviction that such a parallel existed was not. Starting with Pico, Christian Kabbalists had delighted in integrating the *sefirot* within a Christian framework. Pico had equated the *sefirot* with both the Christian Trinity and the three Neoplatonic *Hypostases* and even showed how the ten *sefirot* were connected to the ten spheres of the universe.[92]

According to the kabbalistic teaching that Luria followed, the ten *sefirot* unfolded in the following order and stood for the following divine attributes:[93]

1. Kether Elyon, the "supreme crown" of God.
2. Hokhmah, the "wisdom" or primordial idea of God.
3. Binah, the "intelligence" of God.
4. Hesed, the "love" or "mercy" of God.
5. Gevurah or Din, the "power" of God, chiefly manifested in stern justice.
6. Rahamin or Tifereth, the "compassion" of God and mediator between the two preceding sefirot.
7. Netsah, the "lasting endurance of God.
8. Hod, the "majesty" of God.
9. Yesod, the "basis" or "foundation" of all active forces in God.
10. Malkhuth, the "kingdom" of God, the mystical archetype of Israel's community, often called Shekhinah.[94]

Van Helmont and Knorr equated the first three *sefirot* with the Father, the next six with the Son, and the last to the Holy Ghost.[95] The problem with this line of argument from a Christian point of view was that it led to a conception of the Trinity that had very little to do with the kind of personalized Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost characteristic of orthodox Christian teaching. The kabbalistic, rather than Christian, nature of Knorr and van

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[92] Yates, *GBHT*, p. 101.

[93] Scholem maintains that the name of the *sefirot* were derived from 1 Chronicles 29:11 (*Kabbalah*, p. 106).

[94] Scholem, *MTJM*, p. 213. One of the most daring aspects of the kabbalistic imagery is the prevalence of sexual symbolism and sexuality within the Godhead itself. The *sefirot* are both sexual entities in their own right and "limbs" of the primordial man, *Adam Kadmon*, complete with phallus (*Yesod*). The last *sefirah*, also known as the *Shekhinah*, appears in the guise of a passive female who receives the influence descending from the active male forces among the *sefirot* and transmits them to the created world. But the *Shekhinah* also receives influences from below, from the world of mankind. On the sexual symbolism in the Kabbalah, see the works of Wolfson cited in the bibliography.

[95] Von Rosenroth, "Amica Responsio," *KD*, I, 2: 92.

Helmont's Trinity comes out clearly in the following passage from the *Kabbala denudata*:

> Occasionally, the Tetragrammaton is written with the name *El* and *Elohim*, in such a way as in Psalm 50:1. The Psalmist of Asaph: "*El, Elohim, Tetragramaton* has spoken and called the earth" (Compare Joshua 22:22: "God, God, the Lord, God, God, the Lord). Therefore, while these are joined together, you may perceive the sublime triumvirate of the Praetors seated upon the throne and determining whatever is necessary for the ordering of the world, either for good or bad, death or life. For *El* is mercy for those who are worthy; and ידוד [This is a misprint for יהוה, the *Tetragrammaton*] is fairness for those who were guided by it. From these three names come all laws or fairness, *Rachamim* or compassion, and *Din* or judgment. And this great testimony that the sons of Ruben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manassah made altars across the Jordan (Joshua 22:22) has this meaning: if we make altars for the sake of memory alone, benedictions and beneficence will flow into us through *El*, which is a witness to our intentions. But if we build them for sacrifices, etc. *Elohim* is a witness and judge and punishes us for our grave sin. But ידוד [sic], which is the middle line and mediator tempers justice according to our intentions, either on the side of reward or punishment. For these three names are *Gedulah, Geburah*, and *Tipheret*. In this way, in the description of the creation of the world, the Psalmist of Asaph applies these three names. For God, having been about to create the world, clothed it in the appearance of a triple garment, one of which was the garment of great compassion, the second, the garment of perfect justice, and the third, middle garment consisting of compassion and judgment, all of which arise from that mystery of the created, some of whom are created in mercy, others in absolute judgment, and some in judgment and mercy. And just as wisdom has benevolence and mercy justice in their formation, so the same attributes are involved in the governing of the creatures. For at one time he proceeds with them with absolute mercy, at another wholly with judgment, and at another with both. And to this pertains the mystery of the three books which appear on New Year's day: The first of which is of the just, the second of the unjust, and the third of those in the middle. These correspond to the names El, Elohim, and the Tetragrammaton, all of which must be considered properly when they occur in Scripture.[96]

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[96] *KD*, I, 1: 388: "Scribitur & interdum Tetragrammaton cum nomine El, atque Elohim, quemadmodum Psal. 50, 1. *Psalmus Asaphi: El, Elohim Tetragrammaton locutus est & vocavit terram.* Conf. Jehosch. 22, 22. Dum igitur haec sic jungi cernis sublime triumvirale praetorium super solium sedet, & pro cujusque operis necessitate mundi machinam dijudicat, sive in bonum, sive in malum, sive in mortem, sive in vitam. Nam El est Chesed, pro iis, qui eâ digni sunt; Elohim est retributio & poena pro iis, qui eâ digni sunt; & ידוד [this is a misprint for the Tetragrammaton, יהוה]est aequitas vera pro iis, qui ea promerentur. Unde tria illa nomina continent omnia Mischpat seu aequum; Rachamim seu miserationem, & Din seu rigorem. Et Testimonium illud magnum, quod fecerunt Filii Ruben, & Gad, & dimidia tribus Menasche, altare nimirum trans Jordanem, Jehosch. 22. 22, hunc habet sensum: Si fecimus altare pro nuda memoria, influant in nos benedictiones & beneficia per mensuram El, quae testis sit intentionis nostrae. Si vero extruximus illud pro Sacrificiis, etc. Elohim sit testis & judex, & puniat nos ob grave hoc delictum: sed ידוד [sic], quae est linea media, mediatrix, judicium temperet secundum intentionem nostram, sive pro praemio, sive pro poena. Tria enim haec nomina sunt Gedulah, Gebhurah & Tipheret. Eodem modo in descriptione creationis mundi Assaph Psal. 50, 1. tria haec adhibet nomina. Deus enim creaturus mundum triplici vestium specie amictus erat; quarum una, vestis miserationum magnarum altera vestis judicii perfecti; & tertia vestis media, è misericordia & rigore consistens; quae omnia ex ipso creaturarum mysterio proveniunt, quarum aliae creatae sunt misericordiâ; aliae in rigore absoluto; aliae in judicio & misericordai. Et sicut se habuit sapientia illa & benignitas, misericordia & judicium in illarum formatione, ita eadem

Van Helmont and Knorr utilized other kabbalistic concepts to support the Christian Trinity. In the Lurianic Kabbalah the first three *sefirot*, representing God's wisdom and intelligence, were joined together in the figure of *Arikh Anpin*, meaning the "Long Suffering." The six lower *sefirot*, excluding the *Shekhinah* and representing a balance between God's mercy, justice and compassion, were combined in the figure of *Zeir Anpin*, or "the Impatient."[97] It seemed logical to Knorr and van Helmont to see God, the Father, in the first figure and Christ, the Son, in the second. That von Rosenroth and van Helmont could identify *Zeir Anpin* with Christ is not so surprising when one considers that Scholem describes *Zeir Anpin* as the product of God giving birth to himself. I quote the entire passage because Scholem says things about *Zeir Anpin* that could easily have persuaded a Christian to identify this figure with Jesus:

> The origin of *Zeir Anpin* in the womb of the "celestial mother," his birth and development, as well as the laws in accordance with which all the "upper" potencies are organized in him, form the subject of detailed exposition in the system developed by Luria's followers. There is something bewildering in the eccentricity of these over-detailed expositions—the architecture of this mystical structure might be styled baroque.
>
> Luria is driven to something very much like a mythos of God giving birth to Himself; indeed, this seems to me to be the focal point of this whole involved and frequently rather obscure and inconsistent description. . . .[98]

Von Rosenroth and van Helmont identify Christ with another as well, *Adam Kadmon.* As van Helmont has his Christian Philosopher say to the Kabbalist in his *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, "Precisely what you call *Adam Kadmon*, we call Christ."[99] *Adam Kadmon* is the primordial man, the first being emanated from the divine light, who contained the souls of all subsequent men within himself.[100]

The identification of Christ with either *Adam Kadmon* or *Zeir Anpin*[101] had important unorthodox implications for mainstream Christians, whether

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attributa se habent in creaturarum gubernatione: quandoque enim cum iis procedit in misericordia absolutâ; quandoque in omnimodo judicio; quandoque in ambobus. Et huc pertinet mysterium trium librorum, qui aperiuntur die Novi anni, quorum unus est Justorum; alter impriorum; & tertius mediorum; qui correspondent nominibus ידוד אל אלהים [Tetragrammaton]. Quae omnia, quando in Scripturis occurrunt, probe sunt consideranda."

[97] Scholem, *MTJM*, p. 270.

[98] Scholem, *MTJM*, pp. 270-1. Wolfson discusses a passage from Vital's עץ החיים (The Tree of Life) in which the removing of the torah scroll from the ark is described in terms of the breaking forth of the divine mother, the divine father, and the divine son (Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 21ff.). As we have seen, von Rosenroth possessed a copy of this work (*KD* II, 1: 9).

[99] *Adumbratio*, p. 5.

[100] Scholem, *MTJM*, pp. 265, 279.

[101] One might well ask why van Helmont and von Rosenroth identified both *Adam Kadmon* and *Zeir Anpin* with Christ. The following statement from Scholem provides a possible answer: "The five principal parzufim of *Arikh Anpin, Abba, Imma, Ze'eir Anpin*, and *Nukba de-Ze'eir* constitute the final figure of *Adam Kadmon* as it evolves in the first stages of *tikkun*, which is quite different from the figure of *Adam Kadmon* that existed before the breaking of the vessels." Hence *Ze'eir Anpin* is ultimately part of *Adam Kadmon* (Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 142). Cf. *KD* I, 2: 80-81.

Catholic or Protestant. In the first place, both were generated or emanated from God. They were not co-equal and co-eternal with God as Christ was held to be by orthodox Christians. Secondly, neither *Adam Kadmon* nor *Zeir Anpin* were ordained to suffer and die in order for human beings to achieve salvation. And, finally, if all souls were originally contained in *Adam Kadmon*, or Christ, then it could be argued that Christ was essentially in all souls. Van Helmont makes precisely this point. In his view, Christ was Adam and Adam, like *Adam Kadmon*, contained all created souls, so essentially all souls were in Christ.[102] This was a shocking notion, when taken literally, because it combined at least three heresies, pantheism, Pelagianism, and perfectionism. These ideas hardly squared with the Christian doctrine of original sin and emphasis on man's fallen nature. They suggested, on the contrary, that each individual had the potential to save himself by his own efforts and that, indeed, men were potentially, if not actually, divine.[103] This is a subject discussed in more depth in later chapters. Such views were profoundly unorthodox because they obviated any need for Christ's sacrifice and death in anything more than a metaphorical or allegorical sense and suggested instead that man controlled his own destiny as well as that of the universe. Orthodox Christians routinely dubbed any diminution of Christ's role as "Jewish." The Christian Hebraist Constantine L'Empereur referred with obvious distaste to the Socinian view of Christ as a "Jewish" error: "many people, even some who profess Christianity, do not shrink from frank approval of the Jewish error. They completely reject Christ's expiation for our sins."[104] L'Empereur was right. Socinians, along with other Christian sectarians and mystics, did allegorize Christ's sacrifice as an event repeated in each individual's soul, rejecting the idea that it represented a unique historical episode that made the atonement between man and God possible (but only for those who believed in Christ's death and resurrection). One of the charges brought against van Helmont by the Inquisition was precisely this, that he did not believe one had to know about or believe in the historical sacrifice of Christ to be saved.[105] The kabbalistic doctrine of *ibbur* further undermined orthodox Christian views of Christ's essential role in salvation.

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[102] In a letter to Thomas Burnett, Leibniz refers to van Helmont's belief that Jesus and Adam were one and the same: ". . . Mr. Mercurius van Helmont croyoit que l'ame de Jesus-Christ étoit celle d'Adam, et que l'Adam nouveau reparant ce que le premier avoit gasté, c'estoit le même personnage qui satisfaisoit à son ancienne dette" (Leibniz to Thomas Burnet, 26 May 1706 in O. Klopp ed., *Correspondance de Leibniz ave l'Electrice Sophie de Brunswick-Lunebourg*, 3:217). The idea that Adam contained all human souls appears in *The Divine Being and its Attributes*: "Adam being the Stem and Root from whence all men are descended, and which consequently do retain in them continually a part of Adam; it is very easie to understand, that when Adam receives again the Image of God, that his Posterity are therby put into a capacity of receiving the Image of God again, by vertue of their Fellowship with Adam" (p. 133).

[103] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*; idem, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance."

[104] Van Rooden, "Constantijn L'Empereur's Contacts with the Amsterdam Jews and his Confutation of Judaism," p. 62.

[105] Appendix 1, p. 367 (article 4).

In this instance, Christ's unique role in salvation is assumed by pious, mortal men.

Because *Adam Kadmon* and *Zeir Anpin* were both described by Kabbalists as emanations from God, many Christians rejected them on the grounds of pantheism. The charge of pantheism was the one most often leveled against the Kabbalah and its Sulzbach proponents. Henry More wrote at length on the subject, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter. He was followed by Wachter and Basnage, who charged Spinoza with acquiring his pernicious pantheism from the Kabbalah. The charge of pantheism was just.[106] Given these various doctrines, it is fair to say that the Christ of von Rosenroth and van Helmont is far from orthodox and, indeed, far more kabbalistic than Christian.

Another unique aspect of the beliefs of the Sulzbach Kabbalists involved salvation and the afterlife. Once again it is apparent that their ideas owe much more to the Kabbalah and unorthodox Christian thought than to either mainstream Catholicism or Protestantism. In every one of his works, van Helmont categorically denied the eternity of hell. In his opinion this is a pernicious doctrine that defiled the character of God and drove men to atheism. He went even further than this, elaborating on the problem of the "virtuous pagans." How could virtuous pagans be damned eternally for not believing in Christ when they had not been given the chance to believe? Dante had solved the problem by putting his beloved Virgil in Limbo; but his solution seemed mean-spirited to many later Christians. As D.P. Walker has pointed out, orthodox Christian views of hell as a place of eternal torment became increasingly repugnant to many Christians in the seventeenth century. Origen's concept of *apocatastasis*, or universal salvation, anathematized by the Council of Constantinople in 553 CE, was revived, although the majority of Christians still believed that the orthodox view of hell was the only effective deterrent to vice.[107]

Van Helmont and von Rosenroth were far more explicit and adamant in their denial of the eternity of hell than other Christians who leaned towards this view. They accepted the Lurianic doctrine of *tikkun*, or restoration, which posited that every soul would eventually be redeemed and that creation would only come to an end with the perfection and salvation of everything in it, and that meant everything, from the lowliest pebble, through plants and animals, and up to men. This radically optimistic doctrine was wholeheartedly accepted by the Sulzbach Kabbalists. The Lurianic treatise on *The Revolution of Souls* was printed in full in the *Kabbala denudata*.[108]

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[106] "For Luria and his followers, there is no break in this continuous process of evolution. This fact makes the problem of Luria's theism doubly acute, for the pantheistic implications of this doctrine are too manifest to require emphasis" (Scholem, *MTJM*, p. 272).

[107] Walker, *The Decline of Hell.*

[108] In his *Paradoxal Discourses* van Helmont says he intends to publish this treatise separately, and that he will write more on the revolution of souls: "if. . . I should chance to meet with any person that understands my way of speaking, and is disposed to take it from my mouth" (p. 161). The doctrine of trasmigration was clearly a key element in van Helmont's philosophy.

The idea of *tikkun* had particular appeal for Amsterdam Jews, especially those who had converted or been raised as Christians but converted back to Judaism once they reached Holland. It seems likely that van Helmont was aware of the divisive debate that had taken place among these Jews in the 1630s over the nature of hell and divine punishment. This debate reflected the wider antagonisms in the Christian community between Socinians, Arminians, and Collegiants, on the one hand, who rejected the doctrine of predestination and eternal damnation, and Calvinists proper.[109] But the Jewish debate had a special relevance, even poignancy, which the Christian debate lacked, for it became intimately involved with the peculiar problems experienced by Conversos.

The Jewish debate pitted Rabbi Isaac Aboab de Fonseca against Rabbi Saul Levi Mortera, a senior *Haham* in the Amsterdam Rabbinate. Aboab, a former Marrano, had been tutored in Kabbalah by Abraham Herrera, himself a former New Christian, who had been a disciple of the Lurianic Kabbalist Israel Sarug and whose treatise, *The Gate of the Heavens*, was included in the *Kabbala denudata*. Aboab embraced the Lurianic doctrine of *tikkun*. Quoting the Mishnaic phrase, "All Israelites have a portion in *olam ha-ba* [the world to come]," as well as all the laws of return and restoration in the Torah, Aboab assured every Jew that he would be saved, no matter what his sins. In his treatise *Nishmat Hayyim*, Aboab flatly states that "whosoever is called by the name Israelite will not suffer eternal punishment even though he may have committed the gravest possible sins."[110] Aboab's doctrine appealed to many Conversos in Amsterdam because it confirmed their inalienable Jewishness, regardless of their past or present associations with Christianity: "This is what our rabbis of blessed memory meant when coining the phrase, 'though he sinned, he is still an Israelite' [B.T. Sanh. 44a]. They intended to convey the idea that though he sinned, he was not cut off thereby from the tree but remained a Jew; and even if he apostatized from the Lord and chose new gods, he will again be called a Jew as a result of transmigration and punishments."[111]

Mortera rejected Aboab's teaching on the grounds that it contradicted the "Fathers, the Prophets, the Tanna'im and the Amora'im," all of whom had taught that punishment was eternal.[112] He further objected that such teachings would encourage Conversos to remain Christians and discourage those in Spain and Portugal from emigrating and converting back to Judaism.[113] But when Mortera attempted to affirm the eternity of punishment before a congregation, he met with such great indignation that he decided to appeal the matter to the Beth Din in Venice. There the matter was dropped as being too sensitive.

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[109] Altmann, "Eternity of Punishment"; Benz, "Der Mensch und die Sympathie aller Dinge am Ende der Zeiten."

[110] Altmann, "Eternity of Punishment," p. 11 [text A, lines 1 & 2].

[111] ibid., p. 22.

[112] ibid., pp. 11-12.

[113] ibid., p. 18.

The entire episode has been fully described by Alexander Altmann. What is especially interesting is that although the debate took place in the 1630s, the documents were copied out in 1648. Van Helmont was in Holland in 1648, attending to the publication of his father's works. He was a close friend of the Collegiant Adam Boreel,[114] who published a Hebrew edition of the *Mishnah* in 1646 with the help of Rabbi Judah Leon Templo, who lived with Boreel.[115] Van Helmont was therefore in contact with the circle of philo-Semitic millenarians and their Jewish colleagues and may have actually seen the documents concerning the Aboab-Mortera debate, either at that time or later during the 1650s when Aboab was back in Amsterdam. What suggests that van Helmont was aware of the debate between Aboab and Mortera is the similarity of Aboab's and van Helmont's arguments against the eternity of punishment. Aboab insisted that God could not punish men eternally for sins which derived from their material, corruptible, and non-eternal part. Quoting Psalm 62, 13: "Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work," Aboab comments, "i.e. according to his work performed by him who is non-eternal, and dost not measure him, a mere creature, against thee who art eternal, for thou art not adversely affected by the evil deeds of men." This was one of the major arguments van Helmont (and later he and Anne Conway) used to deny the existence of an eternal hell.[116] The major difference between Aboab's and van Helmont's views is that van Helmont did not restrict universal salvation to Jews but extended it to everyone.

Altmann claims it was common knowledge among Amsterdam Jews that Uriel da Costa had rejected Christianity because the dread of eternal damnation had tormented his youth and that he rejected the same doctrine when avowed by Jews.[117] Van Helmont had the same reaction; he believed the doctrine of an eternal hell was what turned men away from God. The fact that there were both Jews and Christians who categorically denied that hell was eternal was one important reason why van Helmont and von Rosenroth

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[114] Boreel (1603-1666) was a scholar, who corresponded with Hartlib, Dury and Oldenburg. Benjamin Furly tried to convert him to Quakerism, but without success. See R. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*, pp. 25ff; B. Hull, *Benjamin Furly* (hereafter *Furly*). Boreel presented a Dutch hymn to van Helmont entitled "O Heavenly Light," which van Helmont published in his *Paradoxal Discourses*, after the preface. Van Helmont showed Henry More this hymn, and More also included it in his *Annotations upon the two foregoing Treatises, Lux Orientalis. . . and the Discourse of Truth* (1682). When More was revising his *Grand Mystery of Godliness* for his *Opera Theologia* (1675), van Helmont lent him Boreel's *Universi Humani Generis Legislator*. As a result of reading it, More added three chapters to the seventh book (xi-xiii) in which he summarized Boreel's arguments. See H. More, *The Theological Works. . .* , 1708, preface, iv-v.

[115] The edition has Manasseh ben Israel's name on the title page rather than Boreel's in an attempt to make it more palatable to Jews. See Richard Popkin, "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England 1640-1700;" Popkin and van der Wall, "Samuel Hartlib, John Durie on Adam Boreel's Latin Translation of the Mishnah (1659-1661)."

[116] See ch. 9.

[117] Altmann, "Eternity of Punishment," p. 19.

came to believe that the Lurianic Kabbalah, with its doctrine of *tikkun*, offered a meeting ground for Christians and Jews. As van Helmont says:

> Is it [the doctrine of *tikkun*] not like to prove of great service to the conversion both of Jews and Gentiles, to whom the denial of this one thing with some others, is of no small offense and stumbling block to many, both Heathens and Jews, who conclude the Divinity of the modern Christians cannot be good while their philosophy is so bad. Besides, many Doctrines maintained by some Christians, concerning Reprobation, Original Sin, Infinite Damnation and the like, do give great occasion to many, both Jews and Gentiles, to suspect the whole Doctrine is false, and many of them do bless themselves from the God of the Christians, as being not the true God, but an Idol of their own making, whom they have so shaped and framed after their own dark and foolish Imaginations.[118]

The foregoing examples provide sufficient evidence to show that the philo-Semitism of the Sulzbach Kabbalists was indeed unique. Convinced they had rediscovered the original, authentic Jewish-Christian teachings of Christ and his disciples, they accepted complex kabbalistic doctrines that simply could not, and did not, meet with the approval of the Christian community at large. What is perhaps paradoxical, is that for all the abstruseness of their thought, and even because of it, the Sulzbach Kabbalists actually ended up with a far more tolerant and ecumenical outlook than many other thinkers who have been singled out for their enlightened religious views. By accepting the Lurianic doctrine of *tikkun*, which categorically denied the eternity of hell and postulated universal salvation, von Rosenroth and van Helmont undercut the need for any institutionalized system of belief. Anyone could and would be saved. This was the basis for the Inquisition's charge that "Helmont maintains without doubt that anyone in his own faith, of whatever kind, may be saved."[119] If everyone could be saved, whatever his faith, then believing in specific doctrines or specific sacraments was unnecessary. As we have seen, Christian August took this position as well. Obviously, this way of thinking was not tolerable in the eyes of the Inquisition, as another charge against van Helmont makes clear:

> . . . he has professed. . . that confession and the doctrine of the divine Eucharist is unnecessary and superfluous. . . . He maintained vehemently that our baptism with material water is not necessary, but it is sufficient for a man if he marks himself with the character of a Christian by engaging rightly in good works with a certain inner fervor.[120]

Although the Lurianic doctrine of *tikkun* could logically lead to the kind of uncommitted, ethical humanism van Helmont embraced at the end of his life, he was the only one of the three Sulzbach Kabbalists to take this radical step. Von Rosenroth and Christian August remained within the Lutheran and Catholic Church respectively, but even they seem to have come to the conclusion that salvation was open to all. By the end of his life, however, van

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[118] *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 163ff.
[119] Appendix 1, p. 353 (article 4).
[120] ibid., p. 357 (article 10).

Helmont had broken all ties with specific religious institutions. In his case, the search for church unity within a Christian framework had developed into a true spirit of toleration. The short declaration prefacing his *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* succinctly sums up his attitude and beliefs:

> Quaero, non pono: nihil determino dictans:
> Conjicio: conor: confero: tento: rogo:
> Judaeos capto: meliori tramite ductor
> Si fueris, cedo: quaeritur una salus.
>
> I question; I do not assert, saying I determine nothing.
> I conjecture; I make trial; I compare; I test; I inquire;
> I court the Jews. If you have a guide to a better way, I yield.

Another unique aspect of Sulzbach philo-Semitism was the complete absence of anti-Semitism. Beneath the surface of much ecumenically-minded and ostensibly philo-Semitic prose lurks real intolerance and dislike for the Jews as fellow human beings. One of the most astonishing example of this appears in Johann Jacob Schudt's detailed account of Jewish customs. Schudt was obviously interested in Jews and had sympathy for them. Yet he could not transcend stereotypes. He is, for example, well aware of the many Christian prohibitions limiting the ways in which Jews could make a living, but he refuses to believe that these provide a sufficient explanation for why Jews engage in usury. Jews practice usury because they are too lazy to do real work. Furthermore, if they do work with their hands, they are bad at it. To prove this he gives the example of Johann Peter Späth's circumcision and conversion to Judaism under the name Moses Germanus. Schudt explains that because Späth was circumcised by a Jewish carpenter, the job was "botched," causing Moses Germanus great and long-term pain.[121] (One might have thought that at least the profession of Jewish carpentry would be immune from attack!) Schudt was a well-respected Hebraist, but his views were worlds apart from the Sulzbach Kabbalists when it came to seeing Jews as fellow human beings.

Sulzbach was a tiny oasis of tolerance within the much larger European landscape, where hatred and intolerance were the norm. Its ruler, Christian August, was a visionary, far ahead of the vast majority of his subjects and the population of Europe as a whole. His action in initiating the Simultaneum, which forced Catholics and Lutherans to share Church property and tolerate, if only grudgingly, each other, shows what a determined leader can accomplish, if he has the will. Christian August's attitude towards Jews was even more extraordinary. While princes were known to tolerate Jews, their toleration was for the most part self-interested and depended on what Jews could do for them, primarily in terms of finance. When their usefulness

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[121] Schudt, *Jüdische Merwurdigkeiten*. . . . , pt. 2, Bk VI, ch. 12, pp. 169-170. For a fuller discussion of Schudt's attitude towards the Jews, see my article, "Christliche Hebraisten des 17. Jahrhunderts: Philosemiten oder Antisemiten?" On Späth and his conversion, see Coudert, "Judaizing in the Seventeenth Century: Francis Mercury van Helmont and Johann Peter Späth (Moses Germanus)."

ceased, they were abandoned by their princes and persecuted or expelled. Christoph Wagenseil, another noted Lutheran Hebraist, who corresponded with Knorr,[122] paints a dismal picture of the way most Jews were treated in Germany:

> The great misery which the Jews have experienced among us, especially in Germany, have kept them away from the Christian religion. In the preface to his valuable book *De convincendis Judaeis* the learned Herr Johann Hornbeeck lists the calamitous experiences of the Jews in Germany as one of the reason that "few Jews are converted to Christianity in Germany, where they are most numerous." There is some truth in this. The Jews cannot travel safely in our country, nor walk on the street, or remain in their houses. There is no end to the repeated grumbling, defaming, cursing and totally horrible, lying charges that they need Christian blood. A Jew is considered by some much less than dogs. People push and beat them, pelt them with stones and filth in summer and with snow balls in winter. People slap them in the mouth with a piece of pork before they know what's happening, tear their clothes, cheat them when they can and want, rob them of their possessions with force as often as possible, and force them to hand over the dice and to say that Christ is risen. Young children pull them by their coats and grown men by their beards. If people enter their schools, they mock them and do not let them attend to their business nor say their prayers. Who could say enough about all the insults, mockery, and grief which the Jews are forced to suffer daily? Indeed, although honorable and sensible people abstain from the nonsense described above, the Jews in Germany, with the knowledge and sanction of the authorities, have a very hard life, and Episcopius (*Opera*, tom. 1, p. 438) charges us not without cause, [saying], "that it is permitted that they be beaten if they do not keep to themselves their gambling dice or if a public official is not present to oversee them; that they are ordered to live like lepers apart from other men; that they are compelled to wear yellow badges on their clothing so that others will flee from them as if they are abominable; and especially that if they have committed some crime they are afflicted with horrible and unusual punishments and are hanged alive by the feet between two dogs who tear them apart.[123]

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[122] His letters are in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf, 30.4., Auftrags-Nr. 5519

[123] Wagenseil, *Benachrichtigungen wegen einiger die Judenschafft angehende wichtigen Sachen*, ch. vii, p. 98: "Welches die Hinderungen seyn/ wodurch die Juden von der Christlichen Religion abgehalten worden/ und wie ihre Bekehrung moöge befödert werden: . . . halten die Juden/ bevorab in teutschen Ländern von der Christlichen Religion ab/ die grossen Drangsalen/ so ihnen bey uns angethan werden: Und solcher willen hat der vernu(e)nfftige Herr Johann Hornbeeck in der vorrede seines werthen buchs de convincendis Judaeis, das übel Verfahren mit denen Juden in Teutschland/ billich unter die Ursachen gesetzet/ quod tam rari in Germania, ubi tamen frequentissimi ad Christianiam Religionem adducantur Judaei. Ohne ist es nicht/ die Juden können bey uns nicht sicher über Land reisen/ auf der Straße gehen/ noch gar in ihren Häusern bleiben. Des Nach-Gruntzens/ Lästerns/ Scheltens/ und gantz entsezzlichen lügenhafften Fü)rwerfens/ daß sie Christen-Blut zu ihrer Bedürffniss haben müssen/ ist kein Ende. Ein Jud wird von manchen viel weniger geachtet als ein Hund. Man stößet und schlägt sie/ man wirfft sie des Sommers mit Steinen und Unsauberkeit/ des Winters mit Schneeballen; Man fähret ihnen/ ehe sie sich es versehen/ mit einem Stück Schweinen-Fleisch um den Mund; man zerschneidet ihnen die Kleider/ betruget sie wo man kan und mag/ beraubet sie/ so offt nur Gelegenheit sich hierzu ereignet/ des ihrigen mit Gewalt/ nöthiget sie Würffel herzugeben; zu sagen Christus ist erstanden; die jungen Kinder zupffen sie bey den Mänteln/ und die Erwachsenen bey den Bärten/ kommt man in ihre Schulen/ da verspottet man sie/ und lässet sie daselbst ihres Thuns nicht warten/ noch ihr Gebet verrichten/ und wer wolte allen Schimpff/ Spott und Verdruss/ so die Juden täglich erleiden müssen/ mit Worten gnugsam ausprechen?

Wagenseil singles out Christian August as one of the few rulers with an enlightened, attitude towards the Jews. He is particularly impressed by Christian August's rejection of the charge of blood libel, a charge that Wagenseil knows most Christians accept as true:

> In this context we need to mention that the illustrious Prince Christian August of Pfaltz-Sulzbach, etc. has perfectly learned the Hebrew language together with all the Jewish secrets, especially the Cabbala, and that he delighted in such studies daily. After the rumor started twice in his territory, in 1682 and 1692, that the Jews had hanged Christian children, a rumor which was investigated and found to be totally false, he also had official proclamations nailed up everywhere to the effect that his subjects and countrymen were strictly forbidden under pain of mandatory corporal punishment to believe this aforementioned vain fiction and lying rumor, much less to spread it further or to command or allow their children, employees, or tenants to speak of it, let alone to verbally attack a Jew because of these rumors. Whoever wishes to consider these measures bad, of minor importance, and unworthy should consider the words said by the wisest king of the Jews (Proverbs xxi:1): "The hearts of kings and princes are in the hands of the Lord. Like a stream, he directs them where he will.[124]

The heart of Christian August was obviously in the right place as far as the Jews were concerned.

As many scholars have pointed out, the Enlightenment ideal of toleration largely emerged from the manifest intolerance of the Reformation period and the exhaustion that came with the incessant sectarian warfare of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By the end of the seventeenth century a *de facto* tolerance existed in those countries whose citizens had divided religious loyalties and where no single religious group or institution had enough power to eliminate its rivals. But in most cases such *de facto*

Zwar enthalten sich dergleichen Unfugs/ wie auch oben angezeigt worden/ erbare und verständige Leute/ allein wie dem allen/ so haben doch die Juden in Teutschland/ mit Vorwissen und Einwiligung der Obrigkeiten/ ein sehr hartes Leben ? [word missing] auszustehen/ und wirfft uns der Episcopius Tom I. Oper. p. 438 nicht ohne Ursach für: Quod permittitur ut vapulent, si penes se non habeant talos lusorios, aut minister publicus non adsit, qui eos ducat: quod separatim ab aliis hominibus leprosorum instar habitare jubentur, quod in vestibus notas flavi coloris gestare coguntur, ut caeteri eos tanquam abominabiles fugiant: & speciatim quod, si scelus aliquod perpetraverint, inusitatis & horrendis suppliciis affliguntur, vivi pedibus suspenduntur inter duos canes, a quibus lacerantur. . . ."

[124] ibid., pp. 32-33: "Hieher gehöret absonderlich/ daß der Durchlauchtigste Fürst Christianus Augustus von Pfaltz-Sulzbach etc. die heilige Hebräische Sprach/ sammt allen der Jüden Geheimnüssen/ auch so gar der Cabbala, vollkommen erlernet/ und mit solchen Studien sich täglich ergetzet. Er hat auch/ nachdem in seinem Land zum zweyten mahl/ als 1682 und 1692 der Ruf auskommen/ als wenn die Juden Christen-Kinder aufgehangen hätten/ nach genau untersuchter und Grund-falsch befundener Sache allenthalben öffentliche Mandata anschlagen lassen/ durch welche Dero Hochfürstliche Durchl. Landes-Unterthanen und Ingesessenen bey unausbleiblicher Leibes-Straffe ernstlich geboten worden/ den eitel erdichteten und lügenhafften Austreuen keinen Glauben beyzumessen/ vielweniger aber davon weiter Ausbreitung zu thun/ noch ihren Kindern und gebrodeten Leuten/ oder Hintersassen davon zu reden/ geschweig einen Juden deswegen anzufechten oder fürzuwerffen heissen oder gestatten. Wer wolte diese hohe Begebnüssen für schlecht/ gering und nich würdig achten/ dass ihnen beygeschrieben werde/ was der weisseste König (33) unter den Juden Prov. xxi. i. gesagt: Des Königs (und Fürsten) Hertz ist in der Hand des Herrn/ wie Wasser-Bäche/ und er neigets wohin er will."

toleration was bitterly condemned by mainstream Protestants and Catholics, who still envisioned an ideal world in which their particular beliefs would inevitably triumph. Even in smaller, more radical sects, the notion that tolerance was positive in and of itself was not widely accepted. For the vast majority of Christians, salvation depended on correct beliefs, which by definition had to be the exclusive possession of a single Church. This persistent belief in the absolute singularity of truth accounts for the widespread missionizing of the many competing Christian groups. There were places where intolerance did not prevail: but they were few. Historians have long recognized the significance of Amsterdam for the spread of the idea of toleration, but only in the last few decades has the tiny principality of Sulzbach been recognized as an oasis of enlightened religious thinking in a sea of confessional conflict. Christian August is clearly to be credited for this, but largely because of the persistent influence of his friend and adviser, Francis Mercury van Helmont.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KABBALAH, REDEMPTION, AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

The frontispiece of the *Kabbala denudata* shows the high expectations Knorr and van Helmont had of the Kabbalah in terms of religious peace and unity. It also reveals their conviction that the Kabbalah offered a key to understanding the natural world as well. Here the figure of a beautiful maiden with flowing hair and Grecian robes gazes skywards as she runs along a narrow ledge of earth separating the sea from a cave. Her destination is a doorway marked "Palatium Arcanorum" (Place of Secrets). 'Intrat" (she enters) is written on the threshold of this palace, while the word "domat" (she calms, subdues) appears under her right foot and "alterat" (changes for the better, transmutes) under her left. The cave is designated "antrum materie" (the cave of matter) and within it appear the astrological and alchemical signs that stand for the planets and their comparable metals.[1] In her right hand, which is stretched over the swelling waves, she holds a burning torch, under which is written "mare concupscientiarum" (the sea of concupiscence). In her left she carries a scroll representing the Scriptures, on which is written "explicat" (she explains). A ship sails in the distance, while on the edge of the shore, almost submerged by waves, a tree grows. A great circle of light breaks through the clouds and darkness, and within this light are three circles, which in turn enclose three smaller circles. These stand for the ten kabbalistic *sefirot*, or the ten faces (*parzuphim*) of the hidden deity as he revealed himself in the act of creation.[2] Where the sea meets the sky the words "Metaphysica gentiles" are written, suggesting that gentile wisdom has clear limits—it does not reach to, or come from, heaven the way the Kabbalah does. We have seen that Knorr attributed the divisions among Christians to their misplaced dependence on Greek wisdom, which far from being the source of true philosophy had simply muddied the pure waters of divine Hebrew wisdom. The background of the picture offers a representation of the four elements of earth, air, water, and fire, with air suggested by the tumultuous waves, the list of the ship, and the bent trunk of the tree. The female figure in this complex landscape is, of course, the Kabbalah, and the keys hanging on a cord from her wrist indicate that the Kabbalah alone is able to unlock the secrets of both the Old and New Testaments.

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[1] For an excellent interpretation of the symbolism of the frontispiece see Rosmarie Zeller, "Der Paratext der 'Kabbala Denudata.'" Zeller has identified Venus, Mercury, Mars and the Sun, and she assumes the rest of the planets (and hence the metals associated with them), although difficult to see, must be there.

[2] The first circle includes the first three *sefirot*, the second the next six, and the last the *Shekhinah*.

The verbs written on the frontispiece are explained in a poem on the back of the title page of this first volume of the *Kabbala denudata.* These verbs are explained in the poem as follows:

> She explains the ambiguous place in both
> The Old and New Testaments;
> She looks to the heavens and recognizes
> the Trinity in its ten names.
> Illuminating with a spiritual light, she
> dispels pagan darkness.
> She calms the internal turbulence aroused
> by passions.
> She disentangles the hidden minerals in
> the heart.[3]
> She enters the innermost Sanctuary and
> surveys the hidden chamber.[4]

The poem emphasizes the encyclopedic nature of the Kabbalah. Not only does it provide a theology that will unite Christians, Jews, and pagans, but it offers a morality and ethic that calms the passions besetting the soul (illustrated by the lurching of the ship on the stormy sea and the force of the wind exerted on the bent tree trunk). In addition to all this, the Kabbalah provides an entrance to the "Palace of Secrets," or an entree into true natural philosophy, represented by alchemy. Hence, it should come has no surprise that the seven metals are not only associated with the seven planets but also with the seven lower *sefirot* in the following sequence:

> Gold—Sun—Geburah
> Silver—Moon—Gedulah [Hesed]
> Iron—Mars—Tiphereth
> Tin—Jupiter—Nezach
> Cooper—Venus—Hod
> Lead—Saturn—Yesod
> Quicksilver [mercury]—Mercury—Malchuth[5]

These correspondences between the *sefirot*, the planets, and the seven metals are discussed in a Jewish alchemical treatise entitled *Esh M'tzaref* (The Refiner's Fire) that Knorr excerpted and included in sections scattered throughout the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata.*[6] Raphael Patai claims that this treatise gives the fullest presentation of the metaphysical, theosophical, and

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[3] Scholem, *Alchemie und Kabbala*, pp. 81ff.

[4] *Explicat* ambiguos utroque in Feodere sensus.
Alta videt, denoque notat cognomine Trium.
Lucens Pneumaticae, paganas discutit umbras.
Edomat internos, queis spumat Passio fluctus.
Alterat abstrusos minerarum in corde meatus.
Intrat in Arcana, & secreta palatia lustrat.'

[5] Scholem, *Alchemie und Kabbala*, pp. 84-8. As Scholem points out, *Malchuth* is associated with "Goldwasser," but this in tern is often called Mercury. Other sets of correspondences between the *sefirot* and metals are described as well.

[6] *KD* I, 1: 116-18; 185-86; 206-8; 227-8; 235-36; 241-42; 272-73; 301-5; 345-46; 359; 430; 441-43; 455-6; 483-85; 625-26; 676.

kabbalistic foundations of medieval Jewish alchemy.[7] It is therefore of great interest to scholars of Jewish alchemy and all the more so because the original, written probably in Hebrew or Aramaic, appears to be lost. Von Rosenroth made his Latin translation from an Italian manuscript.

The primary goal of this Jewish alchemist is to emphasize the unity of religion and science by showing how the mysteries of alchemy exactly parallel those of the Kabbalah. He cites passages and phrases from the Bible, Talmud, and Zohar and interprets them alchemically. The author was fully conversant with current alchemical theory and practices. But although he mentions various alchemical processes and chemical reactions, he belongs to the select brotherhood of spiritual alchemists, who felt themselves vastly superior to "puffers" or "sooty empirics," to use the derogatory names applied to more practically-minded and mercenary practitioners of the art.[8] Spiritual alchemists, he says, must follow the example of the Prophet Elisha. They must be spiritually pure, despise riches, and practice the art of medicine, for the true alchemist is "the true healer of impure metals."[9]

Thus the Kabbalah unlocks the secrets of the two great books God has given man, the book of Scripture and the book of Nature, since both books—the first dealing with the upper world and the second with the lower—are intimately linked. This great truth leads to another, namely, that the perceived gap between the material and spiritual realms, or matter and spirit, is non-existent. Matter and spirit are simply different ends of a single continuum. This is an essential point and one we will come back to.

Until the publication of Raphael Patai's pioneering book, *The Jewish Alchemists*, most historians have down-played Jewish interest in alchemy. As Patai points out, as long as alchemy was considered disreputable, Jewish historians were loathe to accept the idea that Jews were involved in its practice. For example, in his effort to protect Jews from the charge of charlatanism and gullibility, Moritz Steinschneider inadvertently endorsed an anti-Semitic stereotype when he claimed that "The Jews were much too knowledgeable about the real gold-scales to let themselves be fooled by 'the philosopher' stone."[10] But as Patai argues, when alchemy was considered one of the greatest of the arts and sciences, as it was throughout the Middle Ages and up to the seventeenth century, Jews were as attracted to it as anyone else. The many Jewish alchemical sources he cites amply prove this. As Patai has shown, the great exponent of Lurianic Kabbalah, Hayim Vital, was also a practicing alchemist and physician—the two professions meshing nicely.

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[7] Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, ch. 26, pp. 323ff. This chapter is a reprint with a few modifications of his earlier article, "*Esh M'tzaref*—A Kabbalistic-Alchemical Treatise." Both texts provide a partial English translation of the Latin excerpts included in the *Kabbala denudata*.

[8] On this distinction and the practice of "spiritual" alchemy in general, see Coudert, *Alchemy: The Philosopher's Stone*, ch. 4.

[9] *KD* I, 1: 116; Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 322.

[10] Cited in Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 8.

Van Helmont and Knorr may have known about Vital's alchemical interests inasmuch as Knorr claimed to possess many of Vital's writings.

There is one more provocative aspect to the symbolism of this frontispiece. The tree near the entrance of the Palace is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. According to the text of the *Kabbala denudata*, it is only through this tree that one can reach the tree of life: ". . . it is not possible to come near the tree of life except via the tree of knowledge, which is like a vestibule, though which access is given to the tree of life."[11] This is an extraordinary suggestion from an orthodox Christian perspective; for in Genesis God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden precisely because they have eaten from the tree of knowledge—an act of disobedience, which in later interpretations became the source of original sin (Gen 3: 22). Knorr ignores the orthodox Christian reading of Genesis in favor of an alchemical and essentially kabbalistic and gnostic reading, which sees the quest for and acquisition of both knowledge and eternal life as wholly positive. In the *Gates of Light*, excerpts of which were included in the *Kabbala denudata*, Gikatilla offers this positive interpretation as well: "The Tree of Life is a concept only accessible through the Tree of Knowledge, for the Tree of Knowledge is the gateway for entering the Tree of life." Gikatilla goes on to equate the *Tetragrammaton*, the Torah, and the Tree of Life: ". . . you will understand that the written Torah is the essence of His great Name. The Torah. . . is called the 'Tree of Life,' as it is written: It is a Tree of Life for those who holdfast to it (Proverbs 3:18)."[12] Knorr quotes this passage in the *Kabbala denudata*.[13]

Rosmarie Zeller has pointed out the similarity between the depiction of the Kabbalah in this frontispiece and that of Wisdom in Caesare Ripa's *Inconologia* (1611). Like Wisdom, the Kabbalah's feet hardly touch the ground, an indication that she possesses higher, indeed divine, knowledge. Unlike the figure of Wisdom, however, the Kabbalah does not hold a lamp, but a torch. Zeller makes the interesting suggestion that the torch is most often associated with Prometheus.[14] This association may indicate that the light of the Kabbalah was not a divine gift but had to be stolen from the heavens. Knorr certainly emphasizes the difficulty he has had separating the pure gold of kabbalistic truth from the dross with which it is mixed,[15] an analogy which once again indicates the close parallel Knorr draws between the Kabbalah and the alchemical art of transmutation as well as the role of human beings in the process of restoration.[16]

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[11] *KD*, I, I:629: "Adde quod ad arborm vitae accedi nequeat, nisi per arborem cognitionis, quae quasi vertibulum est, per quod aditus patet ad arborem vitae."

[12] Gikatilla, *Gates of Light*, pp. 219, 221.

[13] *KD* I, 1: 731.

[14] Zeller, "Der Paratext," pp. 149-50.

[15] *Kabbala denudata*, I, 2:3.

[16] Zeller also points out the similarities between the figure of the Kabbalah and the figure of wisdom in Maier's alchemical work, *Atalanta Fugiens*.

The figure of the Kabbalah also recalls the Goddess of Philosophy, who offered Boethius such consolation in his prison cell. A more direct parallel appears, however, in Abraham Yagel's *Gei Hizzayon* (*A Valley of Vision*) in the figure of a woman who also represents the Kabbalah. Yagel (1553-c.1623) was a Kabbalist and a physician, who, like van Helmont and Knorr, tried to integrate the Kabbalah into the scientific discourse of the period.[17] He too was influenced by Boethius, and like both Boethius and van Helmont, wrote while imprisoned. Just as in the frontispiece to the *Kabbala denudata*, the figure of the Kabbalah leads Yagel into a palace, where she discourses on the way the ten *sefirot* manifest themselves in the natural world and human body. Like Knorr and van Helmont, Yagel sees all forms of knowledge as interconnected, with the Kabbalah offering the surest path to both natural and divine wisdom. A tree appears in Yagel's vision as well. It too represents the Tree of Life and is synonymous with the Torah.[18] Yagel also discusses the superiority and perfection of the Hebrew language and the scientific, philosophical, and theological insights it offers precisely because Hebrew words exactly mirror things. In addition, Yagel accepted the transmigration of souls as a way to explain human suffering and defend divine justice.

I have no evidence that van Helmont and Knorr knew Yagel's text. In all probability they did not. The similarity of the female figures in Yagel's vision and the frontispiece of the *Kabbala denudata* may simply reflect prevailing emblematic conventions, which were widely disseminated through hundreds of existing emblem books like Ripa's. Nevertheless it is of the greatest significance that van Helmont and Knorr shared so many of Yagel's ideas about the Kabbalah, language, suffering, and divine justice. Most importantly, they shared Yagel's inclusive view of natural philosophy and made no distinction between religion, magic, and science, as we do today. The similarity of the thought of these three men offers concrete evidence that Jewish and Christian culture was thoroughly interconnected.[19]

It should now be clear why Knorr addressed the preface of the *Kabbala denudata* "to the lover of Hebrew, Chemistry, and Philosophy" ("ad Lectorem Philebraeum, Philochymicam, & Philosophum"). This may seem like an unlikely combination of interests by our lights but it made perfect sense in the seventeenth century. Von Rosenroth's ideal reader would quite naturally combine an interest in the Kabbalah, alchemy, and Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy because such a person would be attracted to the view that matter was essentially spirit and that consequently humans were perfectible, salva-

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[17] On Yagel see Ruderman's translation of and introduction to *A Valley of Vision* as well as his study of Yagel (*Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*).

[18] I am grateful to David Ruderman for pointing out to me these parallels, which he discusses in the introduction to his translation of Yagel and in *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*.

[19] As Ruderman points out, "Yagel's carefully constructed view was informed by a variety of sources—Neoplatonic, kabbalistic, naturalistic, and even Catholic" (*A Valley of Vision*, p. 63). The same statement could be made in regard to van Helmont and von Rosenroth. For a fuller discussion of Yagel and the similarities between his cultural universe and theirs, see Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*.

tion universally attainable, and the millennium inevitable. The mix of Neoplatonic, alchemical, and kabbalistic ideas in the *Kabbala denudata*, as well as in van Helmont's and Knorr's other books, encouraged an exhilarating faith in the ability of man to save himself and the world. The Hermetic Magus at the center of Florentine Neoplatonism reappears in the seventeenth century in the guise of a Christian Kabbalist.

As we have seen, both van Helmont and Knorr were interested in natural philosophy and especially alchemy. Van Helmont set up an alchemical laboratory in the ducal residence at Sulzbach; he later set up another one at Ragley, which introduced Anne Conway to the subject. Much of the esoteric or spiritual side of alchemy came from gnostic and Neoplatonic ideas that had been expunged from orthodox Christianity[20] This is particularly clear in the case of the early Greek gnostic practitioners of alchemy, Bolos of Mendes, Zosimos, Cleopatra, and those who wrote in the name of the legendary founder of alchemy in the West, Hermes Trismegistus. Legend credits Trismegistus with some thirty-six thousand original works, but by far the most famous is the enigmatically brief *Emerald Table*, which consists of a series of oracular precepts. The following one establishes the fundamental alchemical axiom that every created thing emanates from a single divine substance, which assumes innumerable forms in the course of endless transformations: "And as all things were produced by the one word of one Being, so all things were produced from this one thing by adaptation."[21] Alchemists appropriated the ancient symbol of the *ouroboros*, or tail-eating serpent of gnostic mythology, to illustrate their conviction that all matter is essentially one. The Greek phrase εν το παν, meaning "all-in-one," or "one-in-all," is frequently written inside or around the *ouroboros*. The phrase became an alchemical mantra, constantly repeated: "for there is only one substance, in which all is hidden," writes Lambspring in his seventeenth century book of alchemical emblems.[22] Basil Valentine, another seventeenth century alchemist, writes more enigmatically: "More I may not say about All-in-All, since all is comprehended in all."[23] Elias Ashmole, who described his own election as an alchemical adept, took as his heraldic motto, "ex uno omnia."[24] Van Helmont designated himself as "philosophus per Unum in quo Omnia."[25]

The alchemical goal of transmutation was based on the axiom that everything in nature strives for perfection. In the same way that an acorn strives to become an oak and a child a man, the six base metals strive to become perfect gold. The function of the alchemist was to help nature along by speeding up this natural development though various processes of pur-

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[20] Alchemy was known as *the* "Hermetic" art; but Hermeticism was basically a derivative of gnostic and Neoplatonic thought, with bits of popular magic and astrology thrown in. See Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance."

[21] Quoted in Read, *From Alchemy to Chemistry*, p. 54.

[22] *The Book of Lambspring, The Hermetic Museum*, ed. Waite, I: 274.

[23] ibid., p. 323.

[24] Quoted in Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, I:88.

[25] Preface to his edition of his father's *Ortus medicinae*.

ification. The chemical operations which gave alchemists the greatest certainty they were on the right track were distillation and sublimation, or what alchemists themselves were more likely to call "rarefaction," "exaltation," and "condensation." When alchemists saw vapors rise in their vessels, condense, and revaporize, they thought they were witnessing a miraculous transformation in which the soul of matter separated from its body and reunited with it in a more refined and pure state.[26] A dualistic conception of matter and spirit tends to disappear in alchemical descriptions of these processes.

The "reification of the immaterial," which Vickers takes as characteristic of Renaissance occultism, is thus a basic aspect of alchemical thought and one that influenced the alchemical and physical theories of Paracelsus and Jan Baptista van Helmont. Paracelsus describes the creation of the world as a series of chemical coagulations in which astral matter becomes increasingly material. Paracelsian medicine was based on the assumption that immaterial thoughts and passions were reified into corrosive physical substances that coagulated in the body as malignant tartar. Walter Pagel, Paracelsus's and the elder van Helmont's most knowledgeable expositor, remarks on the tendency towards monism in the thought of both men.[27]

Alchemists shared the gnostic, but for Christians heretical, vision of man as potentially divine. In gnostic thought man is a spark of divinity, who has fallen into the world of matter. He has temporarily forgotten his divine nature but can be made to remember it through the experience of *gnosis*, in which he suddenly "knows" what his real condition is (hence the term gnostic, or "one who knows").[28] The gnostic regenerative experience is described in one of the Hermetic dialogues translated into Latin by Ficino. *Nous*, the universal mind, explains to Hermes Trismegistus the power that man possesses to become God:

> See what power you have, what quickness! If you can do these things, can god not do them? So you must think of god in this way, as having everything—the cosmos, himself, <the> universe—like thoughts within himself. Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like. Make yourself grow to immeasurable immensity, outleap all body, outstrip all time, become eternity and you will understand god. Having conceived that nothing is impossible to you, consider yourself immortal and able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing. Go higher than every height and lower than every depth. collect in yourself all the sensations of what has been made, of fire and water, dry and wet; be everywhere at once, on land, in the sea, in heaven; be not yet born, be in the womb, be young, old, dead, beyond death. And when you have

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[26] Another precept in the *Emerald Table* presents a cryptic description of reflux distillation: "Ascend with the greatest sagacity from the earth to heaven, and then again, descend to earth and unite together the powers of things superior and things inferior. Thus you will obtain the glory of the whole world, and obscurity will fly away from you" (Read, *From Alchemy to Chemistry*, p. 54.) Cf. Goltz, "Zur Geschichte der Sublimation."

[27] Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, p. 208; idem, *Joan Baptista van Helmont.*

[28] On the use of the term "gnostic" and Gnosticism, see the Introduction, n. 2.

> understood all these at once—times, places, things, qualities, quantities—then you can understand god."[29]

The Greek alchemist Zosimos experienced *gnosis* as a result of his alchemical visions. "I found that I understood it well," he wrote describing the marvelous moment in which he grasped the mysterious unity behind the endless flux of material existence.[30] The Elizabethan Magus John Dee gained a similar insight into the unity of creation through his *Monas*, a talisman, whose very name expressed the basic alchemical doctrine of the "all-in-one." Dee praised God for allowing men to have, via the *Monas*, "Such great wisdom, power over other creatures and large dominion."[31] This optimism obviously clashed with the Christian doctrine of original sin and emphasis on man's fallen nature. It represented Pelagianism taken to extremes. Van Helmont had a similar gnostic epiphany when he understood that God "is averse to all duality or plurality."[32]

In some forms of gnostic thought man not only has the power to become divine himself but because he is the microcosm and contains the whole of creation within himself, he also has the power to redeem matter as well. Many alchemists viewed themselves as gnostic saviors, whose job was to redeem base matter. Agrippa believed as much:

> Geber teaches in his book the *Sum of Alchemy*[33] that no one can reach perfection in that art without having recognized its principles within himself, indeed, the more each man understands himself, the greater the power of attraction he attains, the greater and more wonderful the work he does, and he rises to such perfection that he becomes a Son of God, and is transmuted into the image of God, and is united with him in a way which is granted neither to angels, nor the world, nor any creature save only man himself; in short, he can become a Son of God, and united with God. And moreover, when man is united with God, everything in that man is also united with the divine—firstly his mind then his spirit and his animal faculties, his vegetative faculty and the elements, right down to matter; indeed, he draws with him even the body, whose shape remains, transferring it to a better destiny and a celestial nature, so that it may be glorified in immortality; and this gift, as we have just mentioned, is peculiar to man, for whom the glory of being made in God's image is truly his own, and not shared with any other creature.[34]

This inflated view of man's role in the universe was encouraged by the parallel alchemists drew between the philosopher's stone and Christ and by their conviction that both were in man. "Christ, that most noble cornerstone, is in us," wrote Robert Fludd, who was, among other things, a staunch

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[29] *Hermetica*, translated with notes and an introduction by Copenhaver (Corpus Hermeticum XI, 20, p. 41).

[30] Taylor, "The Visions of Zosimos,"p. 90.

[31] Josten, "A Translation of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*."

[32] Van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, preface, p. 3.

[33] Actually he does not. As Plessner has pointed out, Agrippa must have found this idea in a treatise belonging to the Arabic corpus of Jabir. Cf. "Geber and Jabir ibn Hayyan: An Authentic Sixteenth-century Quotation from Jabir."

[34] Plessner, "Geber and Jabir ibn Hayyan., p. 115. Cf. H. C. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, p. 460.

proponent of spiritual alchemy.[35] For alchemists like Fludd, transmutation was a process that transformed the alchemist from an ordinary mortal immersed in the physical world into a superior being fully conscious of the mystery of life and death.

Von Rosenroth and van Helmont came to their reading of the Kabbalah with minds steeped in Renaissance Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and alchemy. They were syncretists in the best Renaissance tradition of Pico, Postel, and Reuchlin. What they found in the Kabbalah confirmed what they already knew. The alchemical concept of transmutation as a regenerative experience for both matter and the alchemist has striking similarities with the concept of restoration, or *tikkun*, elaborated by Isaac Luria; and the Hermetic vision of the alchemist as a gnostic savior, who could redeem base matter has astonishing parallels with the incredible powers attributed to man in the Lurianic Kabbalah.

Moshe Idel emphasizes the important role of theurgy in kabbalistic thought. Idel believes that while major trends in kabbalistic theurgy originated in classical Rabbinic sources, the more extreme forms go back to pre-Rabbinic sources that went underground and reappeared in the Kabbalah.[36] In both the Talmud and Midrash the belief exists that by fulfilling the commandments, pious Jews are able to induce the divine presence, or *Shekhinah*, to dwell among the Jewish people. Idel suggests that the Temple service may originally have been such a theurgical activity.[37]

These ideas were greatly magnified in the Kabbalah, where man is held responsible for maintaining the connection between God and the world. Gikatilla, whose *The Gates of Light,* appears in the *Kabbala denudata,* outlines the essential role played by holy men (*Zaddikim*) in maintaining a balance of divine forces in the world:

> If men defile and remove themselves from the Torah and the commandments and do wickedness, injustice and violence, then the attribute of the righteous stands to look and watch and survey their deeds. And when he sees that they reject the Torah and the commandments and do injustice and violence, then the attribute of righteous is removed and gathers itself [above] and ascends higher and higher. Then all the channels and influxes are interrupted.[38]

Idel labels this kabbalistic view of man's function in the universe, "Universe Maintenance Activity!"[39]

One of the principle ways available to Kabbalists for drawing down the divine powers was by pronouncing various combinations of Hebrew letters.

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[35] Josten, "Truth's Golden Harrow." Jung, "The Lapis-Christ Parallel."

[36] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, chs. 7-8.

[37] ibid., p. 167.

[38] ibid., p. 183. The idea of removal of the attribute of the righteous is remarkably similar to the myth of Astrea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bk 1. On this theme and its significance in sixteenth century England, see Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*..

[39] Idel, *Kabbalah.*, p. 170. On the importance of human activity see Scholem, *MTJM*, pp. 244-86;; idem, *Sabbatai Zevi,* ch. 1; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 97ff.; Ruderman, "Hope against Hope," especially pp. 313 ff.

Abraham Abulafia, who perfected this technique, describes the process as well as the effects:

> Be prepared for thy God, oh Israelite! Make thyself ready to direct thy heart to God alone. Cleanse thy Body and choose a lonely house where none shall hear thy voice. Sit there in thy closet and do not reveal thy secret to any man. If thou canst, do it by day in the house, but it is best if thou *completest* it during the night. In the hour when thou preparest thyself to speak with the Creator and thou wishest Him to reveal His might to thee, then be careful to abstract all thy thought from the vanities of this world. Cover thy self with thy prayer shawl and put *Tefillin* on thy head and hands that thou mayest be filled with awe of the Shekhinah which is near thee. Cleanse thy clothes, and, if possible, let all thy garments be white, for all this is helpful in leading the heart towards the fear of God and the love of God. If it be night kindle many lights, until all be bright. Then take ink, pen and a table to thy hand and remember that thou art about to serve God in joy and gladness of heart. Now begin to combine a few or many letters, to permutate and combine them until thy heart be warm. Then be mindful of their movements and of what thou canst bring forth by moving them. And when thou feelest that thy heart is already warm and when thou seest that by combinations of letters thou canst grasp new things which by human tradition or by thyself thou wouldst not be able to know and when thou art thus prepared to receive the influx of divine power which flows into thee, then turn all thy true thought to imagine the Name and His exalted angels in thy heart as if they were human beings sitting or standing about thee.[40]

The idea that the Kabbalist must prepare his limbs for the indwelling of the divine spirit, or *Shekhinah*, is common in kabbalistic thought.[41] Christian Kabbalists could easily interpret this idea along the line of the "inner Christ," or "Christ within." As we have seen, the myth of the gnostic savior takes on a novel form in Luria's interpretation of Jewish dietary laws; for in the very act of eating and drinking pious Jews could elevate the souls in the meals prepared for them! All these examples illustrate the astonishing powers attributed to man in kabbalistic thought. As Idel comments:

> The focus of Kabbalistic theurgy is God, not man; the latter is given unimaginable powers to be used in order to repair the divine glory or the divine image; only his initiative can improve Divinity. . . the Jew is responsible for everything, including God, since his activity is crucial for the welfare of the cosmos.[42]

The fact that there were Jews who were both Kabbalists and alchemists suggests that at least some Jews may have drawn support for an activist stance towards the natural world and a positive view of progress from both sources, just as van Helmont and von Rosenroth did.

Van Helmont and Knorr's contemporaries, together with modern scholars, frequently point to the affinity between radical sectarianism, Hermeticism, and Paracelsian-Helmontian science.[43] To this list we may also add the

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[40] Quoted in Scholem, *MTJM*, pp. 136-7. Cf. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 38ff.

[41] Idel, *Kabbalah*, p. 169.

[42] ibid., p. 179.

[43] See, for example, the articles by Rattansi in the bibliography.

Lurianic Kabbalah. However different in particulars, all these various philosophies shared a belief in perfectionism—in man's inherently divine nature and in his ability to restore the earth to its prelapsarian state. Hermetic Magi and Jewish and Christian alchemists were engaged in a process of personal and cosmic purification. Kabbalists were convinced that the destiny of the world depended on their least word, thought, or action. A similar emphasis on the potential impact of an individual's behavior provided the rationale for the continual, intense, and in some instances pathological, self and social scrutiny characteristic of much Protestant thought. The idea of a sacred community enshrined in covenant theology made it essential for everyone to be his brother's keeper lest one erring individual spoil everyone's chance at heaven.

In the last chapter, I suggested that the Sulzbach court could justifiably be said to have continued the "Rosicrucian Enlightenment" described by Frances Yates. Van Helmont's and von Rosenroth's thinking appears to me to have been deeply influenced by Rosicrucianism. The *Rosicrucian Manifestos* recapitulate many of the ideas in the Hermetic dialogue *Asclepius* and in Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, which was itself a reworking and expansion of this dialogue. But the *Manifestos* offer these ideas in a post-Reformation setting, against the background of almost a century of religious warfare and in the context of the fervent millenarianism it engendered. C.R., or Christian Rosenkreuz, the hero of the *Manifestos* and reputed founder of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, was a European Hermes Trismegistus. He possessed the secret wisdom of the *prisca theologia*, which he left to his disciples in two forms, the book M (which, as Gorceix suggests, probably stands for Liber Mundi[44]) and a construction of the microcosm and the macrocosm, which appears to have been similar to Camillo's microcosmic theater of the world.[45] Like Hermes Trismegistus, Christian Rosenkreuz traveled to the East to gain wisdom and like Pico della Mirandola he believed he could purge all existing philosophies and theologies of their errors and synthesize them into one harmonious Christian whole agreeable to all men.[46] Unfortunately, the learned men he addressed on his return to Europe simply laughed at his ideas; but at least they were not declared heretical as some of Pico's had been. Christian Rosenkreuz concluded that the times were not yet propitious for "the general reformation" he knew would eventually come.

The kind of synthesis of philosophy and theology set forth in the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* is especially interesting in terms of van Helmont's philosophy because it basically consists of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and the Old and New Testaments. The first *Manifesto*, the *Fama*, assures us that this mixture is not new; it was the very philosophy Adam had received after

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[44] Gorceix, *La Bible des Rose-Croix*, p. xxiv.

[45] "He constructed a microcosm corresponding in all motions to the macrocosm and finally drew up this compendium of things past, present, and to come" (cited in Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 248, n. 1).

[46] Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 240-1.

the Fall and which had been handed down to Moses and Solomon. In short, it was the true *prisca theologia* or Pansophia:

> Our Philosophy also is not a new invention, but as Adam after his fall hath received it, and as Moses and Solomon used it. Also she ought not much to be doubted of, or contradicted by other opinions, or meanings; but seeing the truth is peaceable, brief, and always like herself in all things, and especially accorded by with *Jesus in omni parte* and all members. And as he is the true Image of the Father, so is she his Image. It shall not be said, this is true according to Philosophy, but false in Theology. And wherein Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and others did hit the mark, and wherein Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Solomon did excel, but especially wherewith that wonderful book the Bible agreeth. All that same concurreth together, and makes a sphere or Globe, whose total parts are equidistant from the Centre, as hereof more at large and more plain shall be spoken of in Christianly conference.[47]

The ideas presented in the last quotation as well as in the following one makes it clear that whoever the author of the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* may have been, he (or they) considered Rosicrucian philosophy the *prisca theologia* par excellence, which would restore the world to its prelapsarian perfection:

> We ought therefore here to observe well, and make it known unto everyone, that God hath certainly and most assuredly concluded to send and grant to the world before her end, which presently thereupon shall ensue, such a truth, light, life and glory, as the first man Adam had, which he lost in Paradise, after which his successors were put and driven, with him, to misery. Wherefore there shall cease all servitude, falsehood, lies, and darkness, which by little and little, with the great world's revolution, was crept into all arts, works, and governments of men, and have darkened the most part of them. For from thence are proceeded an innumerable sort of all manner of false opinions and heresies, that scarce the wisest of all was able to know whose doctrine and opinion he should follow and embrace, and could not well and easily be discerned; seeing on the one part they were detained, hindered, and brought into errors through respect of the philosophers and learned men, and on the other part through true experience. All the which, when it shall once be abolished and removed, and instead thereof a right and true rule instituted, then there will remain thanks unto them which have taken pains therein. But the work itself shall be attributed to the blessedness of our age.[48]

As the second to last sentence suggests, the Rosicrucians imagined this return to prelapsarian wisdom and concord in terms of the institution of "a right and true rule." In other passages reference is made to "a perfect method of all arts," and to the existence of "new Axiomata, whereby all things might fully be restored."[49] These Axiomata were part of Christian Rosencreuz's legacy. They provided both an encyclopedia of knowledge and an infallible "rule" to discover further knowledge: "the true and infallible *Axiomata*, out of all faculties, sciences, and arts, and whole Nature, . . . which he knew

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[47] Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 249-50. I have taken the liberty of correcting the text according to the footnote.

[48] ibid., p. 256.

[49] ibid., p. 238.

would direct them, like a globe or circle, to the only middle point and *Centrum*, and. . . it should only serve to the wise and learned as a rule."[50] References to globes and circles are made several times in the *Manifestos* and suggest that the Rosicrucians engaged in the Lullist and kabbalistic practice of rotating some kind of wheel representing the celestial spheres in order to arrive at truth and knowledge. This sphere is called a *Rota Mundi*.[51] The conviction that truth and knowledge can be discovered or generated virtually automatically when the right "rule" or "method" is employed became a common idea in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is significant that it appears in the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* because it shows that for all their notoriety, they exhibit many ideas central to the seventeenth century scientific revolution.

The topos of the "Book of Nature" also appears in the *Manifestos*. Two books are available to mankind, nature and Scripture, the one mirroring the other. The dual nature of the divine script printed both in things and on the biblical page provides the rationale for the belief that Hebrew letters are images of things and reveal by their shapes and sounds the essence of things:

> Although that great book of nature stands open to all men, yet there are but few that can read and understand the same. . . .
>
> These characters and letters, as God hath here and there incorporated them in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, so hath he imprinted them most apparently into the wonderful creation of heaven and earth, yea in all beasts. So that like as the mathematician and astronomer can long before see and know the eclipses which are to come, so we may verily foreknow and foresee the darkness of obscurations of the Church, and how long they shall last. From the which characters or letters we have borrowed our magic writing, and have found out, and made, a new language for ourselves, in the which withall is expressed and declared the nature of all things. So that it is no wonder that we are not so eloquent in other languages, the which we know that they are altogether disagreeing to the language of our forefathers, Adam and Enoch, and were through the Babylonical confusion wholly hidden.[52]

The notion that the Bible is the font of all knowledge, if it is understood correctly, which is so central to van Helmont and von Rosenroth, is clearly stated in the *Confessio*. Indeed, the following passage is similar in many respects to von Rosenroth's preface to the *Alphabet of Nature*:

> we do admonish everyone for to read diligently and continually the Holy Bible, for he that taketh all his pleasures therein, he shall know that he prepared for himself an excellent way to come to our Fraternity. For as this is the whole sum and content of our rule, that every letter or character which is in the world ought to be learned and regarded well; so those are like unto us, and are very near allied unto us, who do make the Holy Bible a rule of their life, and an aim and end of all their studies: yea to let it be a compendium and content of the whole world. And not only to have it continually in the mouth, but to know

[50] *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 241.
[51] ibid.., p. 245.
[52] ibid., p. 257.

> how to apply and direct the true understanding of it to all times and ages of the world.[53]

The ideas set forth in the *Manifestos* had a long history, as we have seen, and they also had a future among those like van Helmont who continued in the tradition of Renaissance occultism.

In one last respect the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* offer significant parallels to van Helmont's ideas. They are highly critical of alchemists who pretend to know the secret of transmutation. They insist that gold-making is not the highest and most worthy aim of the art of alchemy; on the contrary "true philosophers are far of another mind, esteeming little the making of gold, which is but a *parergon*; for besides that they have a thousand better things."[54] Among these better things is the practice of medicine, which the Rosicrucians do for nothing, and the discovery of new medicines. In taking this position, the authors of the *Manifestos* echoed Paracelsus, who stressed the importance of alchemy for medicine and chemistry in general. The younger van Helmont took the same broad view of alchemy and was highly critical of the emphasis on gold making. He admitted to Leibniz on several occasions that he did not know the secret of transmutation, although he believed it possible. He was also infuriated by alchemists who tried to cheat the gullible.[55] Because his views were so similar to those of the Rosicrucians in many respects, people suspected that he was himself a Rosicrucian. But although one might say he was very much a Rosicrucian in spirit, he was apparently not one in fact. Even Leibniz, who was reputed to have belonged to a Rosicrucian society as a young man, seems to have suspected that van Helmont belonged to the Fraternity, for he asked him about the Brotherhood, apparently assuming he possessed an insider's knowledge.[56]

The *Rosicrucian Manifestos* were poised between two traditions, an ancient tradition in which knowledge was viewed as a secret wisdom only available to the pure in heart and the modern view of knowledge as a commodity that can be packaged and distributed and thus made available to anybody. While the *Manifestos* broadcast their message to the world and invited men to step into their "kingly houses and palaces," they still presupposed that only the spiritually worthy and spiritually pure would comprehend the message. This is the note upon which the *Confessio* ends:

> yet shall we [the Rosicrucian Brotherhood] never be manifested and made known unto any man, without the especial pleasure of God; yea, it shall be so far from man, without the especial pleasure of God; yea, it shall be so far from him whosoever thinks to get the benefit and be partaker of our riches and knowledge, without and against the will of God, that he shall sooner lose his

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[53] *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 257-8.

[54] ibid., p. 250.

[55] Leibniz to Christian Philipp (2/12 November 1680). AK I, 3: 442

[56] In a letter dated 26 March 1696 Leibniz says, "I suspected that the Rosicrucians were a fiction, which Helmont confirmed. . ." (quoted in Stein, *Leibniz and Spinoza*, p. 329). Couturat suggested in *La Logique de Leibniz* that Leibniz joined a Rosicrucian society in Nuremberg (p. 131, n. 3). Ross denies this in *Leibniz*, p. 5.

> life in seeking and searching for us, than to find us, and attain to come to the wished happiness of the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross.[57]

The image of knowledge as a "kingly" house or palace is common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It had its roots in Old Testament ideas about the Tabernacle and the Temple[58] and was a standard alchemical motif, which presumably was the source for this image in the *Rosicrucian Manifestos*. The image carries over into the work of seventeenth century natural philosophers. Bacon's vision of Salomon's House (Bacon's spelling) in the *New Atlantis* is indebted to this old tradition, but in Bacon one can see the old idea of the Temple filled with the spirit and wisdom of God begin to take on the more prosaic function of an institute for scientific research, where researchers cooperate and share their knowledge and produce it publicly for the common good. Salomon's House itself, however, is anything but prosaic. Anyone reading the *New Atlantis* for the first time with the preconception that Bacon was "the father of modern science" (as I did) is bound to be surprised by the strangeness and decidedly unmodern aspects of the institution and behavior of its inhabitants. Both the building and the wise men who inhabit it belong in many respects to the older tradition of Renaissance occultism with its conception of knowledge as wisdom. Frances Yates' suggestion that Bacon drew from the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* in creating his own ideal brotherhood would explain the similarities. Rossi and others have also stressed Bacon's indebtedness to the past, an indebtedness that points to the difficulty of seeing the scientific revolution in terms of a rejection of the past.

As we have seen, van Helmont and Knorr also employ an architectural image in the frontispiece to the *Kabbala Denudata*. There the Kabbalah is depicted as a beautiful maiden approaching an archway over which is inscribed "Palatium Arcanorum." But while using the old, basically alchemical image of a palace of secret wisdom, von Rosenroth and van Helmont did everything to publish and communicate this wisdom. In the last years of his life van Helmont discussed his ideas with as many people as he could because he wished to make his views known before he died. The communication of knowledge was more important to him than initiation into secret wisdom. In this sense van Helmont was very much a "modern."[59]

The emphasis on the "Word" as the means of redemption, which is a central idea in Christianity, particularly among seventeenth century religious radicals, appears in the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* as well, but in a form that anticipates the subtle way in which science begins to assume many of the redemptive functions of religion. As the *Confessio* says:

> For as there is given to man two instruments to hear, likewise two to see, and two to smell, but only one to speak, and it were but vain to expect speech from the ears, or hearing from the eyes. So there hath been ages or times which have

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[57] Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p 260.

[58] Van Pelt, *Tempel van de Wereld: de Kosmische Symboliek van de Tempel von Salomo*.

[59] On esoteric versus exoteric knowledge, see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*.

> seen, there have also been ages that have heard, smelt, and tasted. Now there remains yet that which in short time, honour shall be likewise given to the tongue, and by the same; what before times hath been seen, heard, and smelt, now finally shall be spoken and uttered forth, when the World shall awake out of her heavy and drowsy sleep, and with an open heart, bare-head, and bare foot, shall merrily and joyfully meet the new arising Sun.[60]

During the seventeenth century science assumes an ever increasing role in this redemptive process of spreading the word to the point that redemption comes to be seen in terms of scientific progress. The attempt to separate science and religion, which has been taken as a cardinal feature of the seventeenth century, is therefore not so much a separation as the incorporation into science of many functions previously fulfilled by religion alone. Boyle's attempt to legitimize science and the role of the scientist by maintaining that scientists are the true "priests" because they alone can read the Book of Nature and thereby provide a firm foundation for Christian belief is an example of this incorporation of religious motifs into science.[61] The argument from design that becomes so important at the end of the seventeenth century (and which Voltaire ridicules in the eighteenth *because* it has become so important) is another. Its popularity suggests that it is a mistake to take too literally what Galileo, Boyle, Sprat, and other natural philosophers say about the necessity of separating science and religion. Science in essence becomes a new religion and in many respects has remained so to this day.

The idea set forth in the *Confessio* to the effect that once the "Word" is spoken, or the truth known, the "World shall awake out of her heavy and drowsy sleep" and "joyfully meet the new arising Sun" belongs in the context of the millenarianism that is so obvious an aspect of the *Manifestos*. But it is also an idea that we shall meet again in van Helmont. For van Helmont the world was composed of innumerable "monads" and most of these were "asleep." In time, however, they would awake and this awakening would start them on a path to ultimate redemption. But in order for the process to begin, knowledge and understanding—in short science—was essential. Van Helmont's attention was set squarely on improving things in this world, not the next. His philosophy therefore provides an additional example to those already given by Charles Webster in the *Great Instauration* of the way religious millenarianism was absorbed into science and philosophy, providing the foundation for the Enlightenment belief in progress.

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[60] Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 257.

[61] Fisch, *Jerusalem and Albion: the Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth Century Literature*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FRANCIS MERCURY VAN HELMONT: A KABBALIST-PHYSICIAN

Three years after the publication of his *Alphabet of Nature*, Francis Mercury van Helmont arrived in England. He came as the petitioner of Elizabeth, the Palatine Princess and Abbess of Herford, to press the English government for the pension they had promised her.[1] His mission led to one of the most significant events in his life, his meeting with the Cambridge Platonist Henry More and his subsequent friendship with Anne, Viscountess Conway.

The first time van Helmont's name had been mentioned in connection with Anne Conway was in the letters her brother had written from Italy in 1653, discouraging the Conways from journeying to Brussels to consult the younger van Helmont about Anne Conway's increasingly severe headaches. But the name van Helmont was not easily forgotten, especially in England, where just five years before van Helmont's arrival the last full-scale plague epidemic had precipitated a controversy between Galenic physicians and their Paracelsian/Helmontian critics. The Helmontians took the outbreak of plague as an opportunity to promote aggressively their theories and cures, and they had even tried to set up a "Society of Chymical Physicians" to rival the more conservative Galenic "Society of Physicians."[2] The plague epidemic became a test case not only of medicine but also of faith, with the Helmontians roundly castigating Galenists for their reliance on an "ungodly" pagan philosopher.

As previous chapters have suggested, religion and science were intimately connected throughout the early modern period and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the minds of the followers of Paracelsus and van Helmont. We have seen that J.B. van Helmont agreed with Paracelsus in stressing the divine source of medical wisdom, which came through revelation and intuition rather than reason. Only those specially chosen by God on account of the purity of their hearts could hope to gain insight into the divine workings of nature. The essentially gnostic[3] nature of this kind of medical knowledge was poles apart from the orthodox scholastic idea that human knowledge came from the diligent study, absorption, and regurgitation of the theories of established authorities. The rejection of tradition and authority marking the radical Protestant Reformation thus carried over

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[1] Petition in the name of the Electoral Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the late King of Bohemia. London, State Papers, Dom. Series, Dec. 1671 to May 17th, 1672, p. 56 (vol. 290, no. 58, fol. 95; vol. 295, no. 55, fol. 92, no 56, fol. 93, no. 57, fol. 94).

[2] Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*; idem, "The Society of Chemical Physicians. The New Philosophy and the Restoration Court." Grell, "Plague, Prayer and Physic: Helmontian Medicine in Restoration England."

[3] On the controversy over the use of the terms "gnostic" and "Gnosticism," see the introduction, n. 2.

into science and medicine, and while it admittedly led to all kinds of spiritual and intellectual excesses,[4] at its best it encouraged the kind of fresh approach to scientific and medical issues characteristic of Paracelsus and the elder van Helmont. There were plenty of people, however, who strenuously resisted this fresh approach. Consequently Francis Mercury van Helmont ran into the same kind of opposition in England he had previously met on the continent, although this time his detractors were Protestants without an Inquisition to back up their threats. Among his most vociferous opponents were Galenic physicians, who broadcast their criticisms in a ballad entitled "London's Plague from Holland, or, Inquiries after the Natural Causes of her Present Calamity." The calamity at issue was the use of chemical medicines as well as the theory of contagion. It is worth quoting the ballad at length because it shows both that the conflict between Galenists and iatrochemists was popular knowledge—undoubtedly because of the plague which had caused the death of 70,000 (and perhaps as many as 100,000) Londoners only a short time before[5]—and it shows that the younger van Helmont's reputation preceded him:

> What's *Englands Metropolis* become forlorne?
> *Europes* late Glory, now a Pesants scorne? . . .
> Must she now truckle to the Dooms of Fate
> Without rescue? T's no bold Champion sent
> To wrest her from the rudest Ravishment
> O' th Rawbon'd Rascall, must he triumph thus?
> And *timpanize* himself with blood of us
> Poor Mor[t]als? Devour more at a meal
> Then *Bell* and *Dragon* in an age could steal?
> Where's all the *Quixots* of our age? Has none
> Th' *Elixir*, the long-look'd for *Stone*?
> No Cure for her, whose Tenants make their boasts
> Till now, they'd rout the most victorious hosts
> Of all Diseases? Here's a *Goliath* stands
> And bids defiance 'gainst th' united bands
> Of *Art*: Then muster up your Forces, say,
> Who shall commmand? or who begin the Fray?
> If Seniority takes place, the *Galenist's*
> Oblig'd in honour first to enter th' Lists.
> What weapons must he use? a Weavers Beam,
> Too great for him to wield, His *Apozemes*,
> *Electuaries*, *Julips*, *Bolus*, and the rest
> Are all too gross to touch this *Spirituallist*.
> More refin'd weapons (though defensive all)
> Some say may shield us from this *Canniball*,
> Enter *Van Helmont* then, who like another
> *Jacob*, endeavours to suppland his *Brother*,
> And with more right perhaps; take but this story,
> What feats hee'l do with his *Elaboratory*,
> How hee'l unravel *Nature*, th' causes find

[4] Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down; Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

[5] Clarkson, *Death, Disease & Famine in Pre-industrial England*, p. 79.

By *Chimick* art what 'tis compounds the wind:
Yet h's *Aquafortis*, *Regis*, and *Coelestis*,
(With choicest spirit, which esteem'd the best is)
Though elevated higher then the gross
And faeculent composure of a *Dos[e]*,
Are too terren t'encounter or contest
With this invincible Antagonist.
Quartans no more shall *Galenists* defame,
Nor th' *Alkahest* the *Paracelsian* blame.
Here's a *Disease* so subtle (though impure)
Baffles them both to find the Cause or Cure.
Let's force Art to her *Zenith* then, and try
The *Virtuoses Etimology*.
How they define, or gravely descant on
This great invisible *Contagion*.
Malignant vagrant *Atomes* are the quaint
(Say they) Compounders of this mortal taint,
Their *qualities* and *motions* yet obscure,
Till the *Dioptricks* can discern th'impure,
Though subtle exhalations that proceeds
From the first matter, which infection breeds.
A *Quere* may be urg'd, whether they be
Not vivid *Atoms*, since we daily see
All sulphurous Fumes these wanderers expels,
With other Insects to remoter Cells.
What ere they be, extrinsique first they are,
And Vagrant too, why suffered then so farre
T' entrench on humane nature? cannot Art
Contrive a *Statue Law*; and whip this tart
Unruly *Vagabond* from mortal bounds,
Or (as the Country-man the Stragler pounds)
Confine him? No, This *Hoegen Mogan Lord*,[6]
(Though wafted higher on a Shipwracks bord[7])
Takes so much state upon him, (like his Sire,
The sink of *Christendome*, *Europes* Quagmire)
That Civil Laws this *Gaderen* defies,
With Arts and Sciences as Enemies.
Is Art then stinted? a *non ultra* here
To her proceedings? Th' Question is not cleer;
The fountain's muddy whence this taint first came,
Why then should th' *English* Artist foul his name,
In pudling into th' Cause, thus much Ile say,
If *sympathetick* Atomes bear the sway,
Our *Calvenist* with h's motled Brotherhood,
Draws *Dutch* Opinions, and his Countryes blood.[8]

However, van Helmont's reception on English shores was not uniformly hostile. There were a number of people who shared his medical theories and ecumenical outlook, and this included people in high places. One of his first

[6] A contemptuous term for a Dutchman taken from the title of the Dutch Estates General, meaning "High-mightiness."

[7] This may be further confirmation that van Helmont had, indeed, traveled to England in the 1660s and experienced the shipwreck he describes in his *Memoirs*.

[8] *The Bagford Ballads: Illustrating the Last Years of the Stuarts*, pp. 39-40.

stops after his arrival was at Newmarket to join Charles II for the horse races. Prince Rupert was there, and as we have seen, he was a close friend of van Helmont. Unlike his brother, Karl Ludwig, who sided with Parliament during the Civil War, Rupert had cut a dashing figure as a Cavalier General in the service of his uncle, Charles I. He was therefore most welcome at the Restoration Court of his cousin, where he shared the King's interest in chemistry and the arts.

Van Helmont had another destination in mind as well. He came to England with letters from Knorr to Henry More. Knorr and van Helmont had read More's writings in Germany and from the reference Knorr makes to More in the preface of van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*, they both thought highly of More's work.[9] News of van Helmont's intended visit reached More through Dr. Timothy Clarke, physician-in-ordinary to the King, and More delayed his annual trip to Anne Conway at Ragley expressly to entertain van Helmont in his rooms at Christ's College. The meeting was to have a profound impact on the lives of van Helmont, More, and Conway, but that only became apparent over time. For the moment, More's primary concern was providing suitable entertainment for a visitor, whose reputation had preceded him. According to the account he wrote to Anne Conway, the meeting was a great success. Impressed by van Helmont's "good, plaine and expert humour. . . yet with a dew guard upon himself,"[10] and knowing of his reputation in medicine, More entreated van Helmont to try out his medical skills on Lady Conway, whose headaches had baffled the minds of eminent physicians of the caliber of William Harvey, Theodore Mayerne, and Thomas Willis.

In the years before her meeting with van Helmont, Anne Conway had been subjected to excruciating medical procedures in the hope of alleviating the terrible pains that were slowly incapacitating her. She had been made extremely ill by the mercury treatments recommended by Sir Theodore Mayerne and by the Mercurial powder prescribed by Charles Hues, and she nearly died as a result of the mercury administered to her by Frederick Clodius, the chemist son-in-law of Samuel Hartlib.[11] In addition to mercury,

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[9] Van Helmont, *Kurtzer Entwurff*, preface, p. 13.

[10] Henry More to Anne Conway, 13 October 1670, *CL*, p. 323.

[11] *CL*, pp. 91, 94-7, 102, 104. Thomas Willis wrote up Anne Conway's case and describes the mercury cures prescribed for her condition. Mercury is, of course, a poison, which explains why Willis admits he was so "terrified" by the effects of the supposed cure that he stopped prescribing it altogether: "We shall consider, whether Salivation for the Curing old and confirmed Headaches is to be administered. Indeed, if the pains of the Head arise from the Venereal Disease, no doubt but that evil Remedy ought to be applyed to that evil Distemper: But having tryed that kind of remedy in Headaches arising from other causes, I found not the harvest worth the pains, and I confess some examples in those kind of cases, have terrified me from that method. A certain noble Lady (whose sickness is below described) for the Curing of a cruel and continual Headach, underwent a plentiful Salivation three times, viz., the first by Mercurial Oyntment, by the counsell of Sir Theodore Mayern, and afterwards twice by taking the lately famous Powder of Charles Huis, without any help, I wish not with some detriment: for afterwards for many years, even to this day, the disease being by degrees increased, she suffer'd under its heavy Tyranny . . . (p. 122) She had endured from an oyntment of Quicksilver, a long and troublesome Salivation, so that she ran the hazard of her life. Afterwards twice a cure was

she had been dosed with tobacco[12] and coffee—both considered medicinal at that early date—as well as a "blue" and "red" powder and the "salt of vipers." She had even ventured across the channel to France to be trepanned, although once there no one dared to perform the operation and her jugular arteries were opened instead—an equally risky operation one would imagine![13] The gentler cure of "stroking" had been performed on Conway by the famous Valentine Greatrakes, brought over from Ireland expressly for this purpose, but it failed as well.[14] Thus More viewed van Helmont's arrival in England as a stroke of luck. At his request, van Helmont agreed to visit the sick Viscountess.

Van Helmont's initial visit to Ragley was brief. He arrived in November 1670 and left in December for the continent.[15] He returned, however, in 1671 and, except for relatively brief trips to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Sulzbach, remained at Ragley for the next eight years until Anne Conway's death in 1679. The therapies van Helmont prescribed to improve Anne Conway's condition were unfortunately ineffective. Nonetheless, it is worth the effort to reconstruct them and recover their theoretical underpinnings; both provide insight into the medical practice of the period and offer a fuller picture of van Helmont's kabbalistic philosophy.

Francis Mercury's medical views are scattered throughout his work, but one of the fullest expositions of his theories appears in his *The Spirit of Diseases* (1692). Van Helmont's theories as a philosopher and a physician were all of a piece; they began and ended with the unique combination of ideas he derived from his father's philosophy and the Lurianic Kabbalah. Like his father and contemporary Paracelsians and Helmontians in general, the younger van Helmont was convinced that knowledge came from the heart, from intuition and not from reason. His was the essentially gnostic and mystical epistemology typical of Paracelsus and Boehme:

> He that makes it his business to investigate and search out the Nature of things, considering the same all manner of ways, and in all their parts, shall frequently perceive, that after all his reiterated Cogitations and Studies, the things themselves he is in quest of shall, without any reasoning, or further toiling himself, all on a suddain be opened to him: And if he enquire whence this Clearness of Discovery proceeds, shall sometimes perceive that the same proceeds from his Heart, or the midst of his Body, which many have found by

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attempted (though in vain) by a Flux at the Mouth from Mercurial Powder, which the noted Empirick Charles Hues [sic] ordinarily gave" (Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses* in *The Remaining Medical Works of that Famous and Renowned Physician Dr. Thomas Willis* . . . . 1683, p. 134; cited in *CL*, p. 91, n. 1.

[12] ibid., p. 129. Tobacco was believed to possess various medicinal properties. It was considered especially effective in warding off plague. During the epidemic in 1665, boys attending Eton College were obliged to smoke every morning and whipped if they failed to do so (Clarkson, *Death, Disease and Famine*, p. 105).

[13] For a discussion of Anne Conway's case and her relationship with van Helmont, see Hutton, "Of Physic and Philosophy: Anne Conway, F. M. van Helmont and Seventeenth-Century Medicine."

[14] *CL*, pp. 244ff.

[15] ibid., p. 326.

> Experience. And this Knowledge which proceeds from the Heart is so full and clear, that there is no doubting of its certainty; and they who have had experience of it must confess, that it appeared to them as a most clear Light.[16]

The spiritual basis of his epistemology carried over into his physics and chemistry as well. Like his father, the younger van Helmont rejected atomism and the mechanical philosophy on the grounds that mechanical explanations were inadequate to account for the enormous variety of existing things. Only spiritual forces endowed with design and purpose could possibly explain the complexity and wonder of life. Consequently, the only truly existing thing was spirit:

> And if so be any one will . . . deny that the essential part or Essences of Creatures are Spirits, and consequently assert them to be Bodies; I will demand of him, whether all Bodies, as such do not proceed from one and the same Earth; and if so, how their Figures come to be so divers, and various? If any one will here pretend that the different Figures of Bodies proceeds from the greater or lesser quantity of Salt, Earth or water entring their Composition, or because they consist of the smaller or grosser Particles of these three; then my demand is, what it is that frames these different Particles? and whether they be the Product of the Bodies themselves? If this be asserted, it will follow that any Body or Figure may be produced only by a confused mingling of Bodies, without the assistance of their Life, which dot form the Figures of Bodies. But where is the Artist that can do this? since it is evident that Nature her self dot not change any body, without the Operation of its Spirit or Life.[17]

Van Helmont rejects the Cartesian definition of matter, which he paraphrases as, "*a thing extended in Height [sic], Length and Breadth, or a thing of a determinate Extension*" and replaces it with his own definition: "*a body is a tangible Birth of the Water, differing in shape and quality, according to the Power or Activity of its Former [i.e. that which shapes it] of Life.*"[18] As his father's laboratory assistant, he may have observed the famous tree experiment, in which the elder van Helmont concluded that a tree's growth was due to water and nothing else. According to both father and son, water was the matrix from which all existing things emerged, and it was a spiritual, not a physical, matrix. Taking the first chapter of Genesis literally, the younger van Helmont argued that "all Creatures were brought forth out of the Water, by the Spirit which moved upon them."[19] In both his kabbalistic and his medical works Van Helmont categorically denied creation *ex nihilo*. As he says in *The Spirit of Diseases*:

> If *to create* signify the Production of a thing out of nothing, then is it an absolute Unintelligible Expression, neither can any Man know what is meant by it, because no Thought or Conception can be framed of nothing; whereas the use of words is to conveigh to us the signification and understanding of things, whereof they are the marks and indications.[20]

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[16] *The Spirit of Diseases*, pp. 80-1.
[17] ibid., pp. 64-5.
[18] ibid., pp. 75, 78.
[19] ibid., p. 9.
[20] ibid., p. 7.

Francis Mercury thought he could prove that everything came from water on the basis of digestion, which he envisioned as a process in which material food was transformed into a spiritual, watery substance capable of nourishing and replenishing the body:

> And seeing that our Meat becomes changed into a fluid Water that it may be fit to feed our Bodies. . . and that this Water also must in part be made so spiritual, as to be able to supply and recruit our Thoughts. . . it follows *that Water* (which is the Original of all Creatures. . .) *must be a spiritual Essence*; because nothing can ever be changed into a quite other Essence, than that from whence it originally proceeded: And for as much as Bodies may be changed into a spiritual Being, as hath been just now proved of our Food; therefore of necessity their Original, viz. the Water must also be spiritual.[21]

This observation led van Helmont to the further conclusion that every body is the product of its special spirit, or *archeus*, to use the term employed by both his father and Paracelsus. It was the function of this spirit to maintain the body by overseeing the process of digestion:

> Wherefore if we seriously consider this, with the reasons before alledged, we shall find that we may safely conclude from the Premises; *That every creature must have its own Spirit or Life by means whereof he converts his Food or Nutriment into his own Nature, and that the said Spirit, or Former, is the Essentiality of that Creature, or body, wherewith it is united*: for as much as the body must always flow, or comply with the Efficiency of the Spirit or Life.[22]

Since the body is therefore "nothing else but an effect of the Spirit,"[23] it followed that physical disease was caused by the malfunctioning of the spirit. What caused the spirit to fail to fulfill its appointed task was fear or apprehension. The power of ideas and particularly of ideas impressed on the imagination was as important for the younger van Helmont as it had been for Paracelsus and his father in the etiology of disease (as well as any other kind of physical change). As the younger van Helmont says, "the principle cause of Diseases, is an apprehension, or strong Imagination, and Fear with the rest of those Passions we stir up in ourselves."[24] Every created thing constantly gives off and takes in spirits, and these powerfully effect the imagination for good or ill:

> Now as the eyes give out their spirits, so they receive from without the Images, or the Spirits that form those Images from others; which Spirits if they overpower ours, and excite a fright or desire in us, we shall find our selves to be affected by them, after the same manner as some People are; who seeing others falling into Fits, or Seiz'd with the Falling-sickness, have by the Fright been over-taken with the same distemper. Neither is there anything more common and notorious than that Women with child being affrighted at any thing, do imprint upon the Infant in their womb, the Image of the Object of their Fright:

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[21] *The Spirit of Diseases*, pp. 29-30.
[22] ibid., pp. 65-66.
[23] ibid., p. 3.
[24] ibid., p. 138.

> whereas if they be not apt to be frightened, the object will make no impression on the Birth in their Body.[25]

Given that the cause of disease lies in the imagination and the power of harmful ideas, it is understandable that psychotherapy should be van Helmont's remedy of choice. As he says, patience and love provide the pathway to health because both eliminate fear:

> When we thus consider Sickness as conducive to our good and profit, and according to the Intimation it affords us, change our former course of living; then the Fright or Apprehension, which caus'd the Disorder, ceaseth, and on the contrary, a Joy and Delight ariseth in us, because it points us to what is defective in us. Now that this Joy and Patience is a certain Remedy against Diseases is evident; for when we are by Patience come to a union and Agreement with the thing that at first awakened the Fright, or the Passions in us, it of necessity follows, that the Fright or Passion whatsoever it be must be changed, because we now love and are perfectly reconciled to that thing which was the object of our Fear, etc. so that our former Fright or other Passion is now changed into Love and good-liking; which Love and complacency, being opposite to the former Fear and Apprehension, must by consequence change our Sickness into Health; for the same reason that the Fright and Aversion changed the due and orderly Operation of Nature into disorder or Sickness.[26]

As his own patient, van Helmont practiced what he preached. In his *Memoirs* he describes curing himself of a severe shoulder injury by embracing a tree whose branch had fallen on him. As we have seen, the Inquisition got wind of this incident and used it as evidence of van Helmont's unorthodox thinking and behavior. For orthodox Inquisitors brought up on Aristotle and Galen—if they were medically inclined—such foolish notions could only smack of enthusiasm and magic.

Van Helmont was not alone in recognizing the tremendous power the mind had over the body. Both popular and elite culture subscribed to the idea that individuals could cast malignant spells on others simply by a glance—hence the so-called "evil eye"—or by a deadly thought. The early modern period marked the high point of the witch hunts, and witches were believed to possess precisely these powers. Van Helmont's notion that "love" could cure thus put a positive spin on a common belief; it was also a variation on the Christian concept of the power of faith. George Fox, for example, who came to know van Helmont well after the latter's conversion to Quakerism, cured himself of a hand injury inflicted by an irate listener as he preached. This episode, which Fox describes in one of his journals, parallels van Helmont's experience with the fallen tree branch.

> There was in the company a mason, a professor, but a rude fellow, who with his walking rulestaff gave me a blow with all his might just over the back of my hand, as it was stretched out; with which blow my hand was so bruised and my arm so benumbed, that I could not draw it to me again. Some of the people cried, "He hath spoiled his hand for ever having the use of it any more." But I

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[25] *The Spirit of Diseases*, p. 126.
[26] ibid., pp. 192-3.

> looked at it in the love of god (for I was in the love of god to all that persecuted me) and after a while the Lord's power sprang through me, and through my hand and arm, so that in a moment I recovered strength in my hand and arm in the sight of them all.[27]

Fox's account is significantly different from van Helmont's, however, for he attributes his cure to "the love of God" and "the Lord's power," while van Helmont makes no mention of any power other than his own. Van Helmont viewed human beings from an optimistic kabbalistic perspective that envisioned them as potentially divine rather than dependent on the grace of God.

Van Helmont's medical theories were greatly influenced by the alchemical assumption that substances could be purified, improved, transmuted, and, in a word, perfected through the careful ministrations of the alchemist. He applied alchemical theory to medicine, firmly believing that the pain and suffering of a patient was similar to the first step in the alchemical process, a temporary stage during which impure or "sick" substances were "mortified" and "died," only to be resurrected in a purer or, one might say, "healthier" state through the application of appropriate "medicines."[28] As we shall see in the next chapter, the idea that pain and suffering are beneficial helped Anne Conway come to terms with her suffering once all other remedies proved ineffectual.

Given van Helmont's emphasis on the psychological causes of illness, it may seem illogical that he should have prescribed physical medicines based on a wide variety of animal, vegetable, and chemical products. However, since a disturbed imagination could produce physical effects through malignant ideas, the physical manifestations of disease called for treatment along with the psychological cause of the disease. In any case, as we have repeatedly seen, van Helmont made no distinction between the material and mental or spiritual realms. In this sense, medicines impressed their "thoughts" on the minds and diseased organs of the patient in exactly the same way that the thoughts of the patient affected the physical body. Like his philosophical and medical ideas, van Helmont's remedies are scattered throughout his writings, but a collection of them was published after his death in *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*.[29]

In van Helmont's view a healthy body was one in which there was a balance between the "watery" and "fiery" essence from which it was composed. Remarking on Genesis 1:27 ("God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created

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[27] Fox, *Cambridge Journal*, I:133.

[28] The first stage in transmutation was generally known as the "black" stage, which symbolized death. On the various stages in the alchemical process see Coudert, *Alchemy: The Philosopher's Stone*.

[29] *Thesaurus novus experientiae Medicae aureus. . . Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana.* This may have only been foisted on van Helmont, but it could also have been based upon the unpublished second part of his *The Spirit of Diseases*. In any case, the remedies are similar to ones scattered through van Helmont's other published writings and letters. I have used the English translation made by Darrow and currently in the Darrow archives in the library at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland.

them"), van Helmont says we are not to take this passage literally as if "our first Parents were Hermaphrodites, as some Scoferes might conclude,"

> but that every Man, and so our first Parents, does consist of a masculine or fiery, and a female or watery Essence; the masculine or fiery Essence being predominant over the watery in Males, and the watery over the fiery in Females. And accordingly Experience tells us, that Men are stronger and more fiery than Women, and therefore are appointed their Head, and to have Dominion over them.[30]

The cause of disease is a deficiency in a body's fiery essence and a prevalence of the watery essence: ". . . when any thing becomes defective in its fiery Essence, so that it cannot, as formerly, form and subdue the watery Essence for the support of its body, then the Body decays and dies."[31] Since in van Helmont's view salt "doth greatly partake of the Nature of Fire,"[32] chemical salts served as medicines. Once again, van Helmont backs his medical theory with Scripture:

> When we heedfully consider this Effect of Nature, *Viz.* that *the Fire doth produce Salt, and that Salt reciprocally is in part chang'd into a Prolifick and fructifying Fire*, we shall surely be guided to a clearer understanding of the Words of our Saviour, Mark 9. 49. *Every one shall be salted with fire.* And this Fire of Life which is in the Salt, is properly that which preserves the Creatures from Putrefaction; for when this Life hath once left the Salt, it is no longer of use to season things withall, and therfore we read Vers. 50. *But if the Salt hath lost its Savour. . . wherewith shall it be salted. . . .*[33]

What may perhaps have struck the reader as odd about this notion of a "fiery" and "watery" essence within individuals is that it seems surprisingly close to the Galenic concept of humors. Van Helmont's "watery essence" is similar to Galenic "phlegm" and his "fiery essence" serves a purpose similar to the "sanguine humor" so necessary to health in the Galenic system. Perhaps even more surprising is how similar van Helmont's ideas are to those of Aristotle. For all the apparent novelty of Helmontian medicine, old ideas, especially about gender difference, lingered on. In *On the Generation of Animals* Aristotle describes women as defective males (something Aquinas would adopt and pass on) because they lacked sufficient heat to concoct semen fully. In essence women were clogged up with unconcocted menstrual fluid. Women's reputed "coldness" was even cited by later authorities to explain their lesser intelligence and to make a virtue of male baldness. Because women were cold, they retained the hair that male heat literally burned off male heads. In addition, because of their cold nature, women lacked sufficient heat to drive matter upwards. What should have been female brains, remained, alas, below the waist.[34]

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[30] *The Spirit of Diseases*, pp. 13-14.
[31] ibid., p. 16.
[32] ibid., p. 21.
[33] ibid., pp. 23-4,
[34] Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women;" Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women.*

A number of historians, most notably Allen G. Debus, have remarked on the diminishing controversy between Galenists and Helmontians in Restoration England. By the 1670s and 1680s many Galenists routinely prescribed chemical medicines. This was facilitated by the overlap between Galenic humors and the Paracelsian/Helmontian principles of salt, sulfur, and mercury, which in many instances served the same purpose of signifying specific pathological states in the body—too hot, too cold, too moist, too dry. Thus while the etiology of disease in the Galenic and Helmontian systems clearly differed—for Galenists disease was a negative state due to an imbalance of humors, while for Helmontians diseases were specific entities attacking specific organs—the illnesses routinely treated by every sort of practitioner from Galenists to Helmontians to wise men and women, quacks, and charlatans were similar, as were their symptoms. This accounts for the fact that there is very little to distinguish the medicines described in *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana* from those in more conservative pharmacopoeias of the period. For the most part, they all contain a mixture of herbal and chemical medicines interspersed with cures that depended on amulets, talismans, and even astrology.

The remedies in all these handbooks had been passed down through centuries to deal with the kinds of problems affecting people in a pre-industrial society, where chronic poverty and malnutrition were the lot of the vast majority and even the well-off could not protect themselves from accidents and illness. For example, in a society sustained for centuries by a cereal based diet, the general absence of a sufficient intake of butter, cheese, eggs, and green leafy vegetables ensured a deficiency of vitamin A. This resulted in eye disorders and skin eruptions. Small wonder then that van Helmont's *Medicina Helmontiana* contains many cures for such things as "Severe hereditary Scurf," "Red Face Pimples & Blotches," "Erysipelas," and "Red Eyes," "Swollen Eyes with Red Rims," and "Discharging Eyes." He offers directions for "wearing of amulets to help the eyes" and a recipe described as "a very valuable eye water" and "a highly approved eye balsam." The lamentable lack of sanitation in the early modern period ensured that tainted food and water were a constant source of illness. Milk sold in open pails from infected cows in filthy urban streets was a source of tuberculosis as well as food poisoning. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tuberculosis was responsible for one fifth of all the deaths in London, and the disease was particularly severe for those under four.[35] Fly- and worm-ridden meat and adulterated or unsanitary grain and water ensured that dysentery—otherwise known as the "bloody flux," "lusk," "surfeit," or, more graphically, "gripping of the guts"—was a common complaint and explains why van Helmont's medical compendium, like every other, contains remedies for "stomach ache," "vomiting and diarrhea," "worms," "diarrhoea and dysentery," "Colic pain in the Bowels or Gripes in the Stomach," and "hemoerage of the stomach." Poor sanitation brought with it

[35] Clarkson, *Death, Disease & Famine*, p. 39.

typhus and a variety of fevers that van Helmont tried to cure with remedies that included salves, bandaging, and drinks made with such things as beer, wine, nutmeg, cream of tartar, roasted hare's heart, and cobwebs. Constipation was a particular problem for the upper classes with their excessive consumption of meat, and van Helmont offered several recipe for this as well:

> Watercress boiled in milk. Give to drink Again, Make Honey & lard warm in a pan, take a piece of bacon as thick as a finger and use as a suppository. Again, Take the water from Saur Kraut or turnips mixed with sugar. Makes a good purgative, especially in fevers. Externally rub the navel with salted butter.[36]

Kidney and bladder stones were frequent and excruciatingly painful, accounting for several pages of remedies,[37] so too were coughs, colds, rheumatism, small pox, and plague. All these diseases warranted special recipes in van Helmont's book, as did the problems afflicting women in childbirth in an age before antiseptics or, in most cases, forceps. A leitmotif of repulsive ingredients runs through all these recipes, which is another indication of their similarity to those used by other healers and alchemists at the time: "dog," "swine," or "mule manure," "Powder from rainworms," "a cloth with which a corpse has been washed," "a human bone from a church yard," "a toad dried and powdered," "mouse excrement," "whitened dog excrement (caused by eating bones)," "a hedgehog or Goats hoofs," "the mucus or phlegm (foam) from a tired horse." Mercifully these make up a minority of ingredients, and it is a comfort to know that chicken soup was an old staple then as it is now: ". . . after delivery immediately give chicken or capon broth (Killed as soon as mature)."

When one looks at the various recipes as a whole, one sees a mixture of natural and herbal remedies that had been used for centuries, made from such things as wintergreen leaves, aloe, walnuts, camphor, almonds, sage, onions, roses, cloves, olives, opium, and "good old wine" (my favorite). Some of these undoubtedly did help alleviate skin conditions, aching limbs, cuts, stomach upsets, and other minor ailments. A number of chemical remedies may also have proved effective, at least in some cases, for example, the use of mercury to cure syphilis; but others involving antimony, arsenic, henbane, and other poisons must often have had grievous side effects. Two patients treated by van Helmont while he was staying with Anne Conway at Ragley Hall, Henry More's "Neece Ladde" and "Cousin Hall," were reluctant to continue taking van Helmont's medicines because their side effects were so unpleasant.[38]

In trying to fathom the logic behind these prescriptions, two salient points emerge: first, the traditional nature of most of the recipes, deriving as they did from old herbals and ancient authorities like Dioscorides, Pliny, and

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[36] *Medicina Experimetnalis Helmontiana*, p. 16,
[37] ibid., pp. 23-6.
[38] *CL*, pp. 389-400, 426.

Matthioli;[39] and, second, the prominent role that sympathy (or antipathy), homeopathy, and analogy play in their rationale. The following treatment for "Birth Marks and Out Growths" provides an unsettling example of a cure expected to work by antipathy: "Allow the hand of a dead person who has suffered long from a chronic disease to lay on the spot, until the place becomes chilled. This will entirely drive away the marks although they will wax and wane with the changing phases of the moon."[40] The elder van Helmont also recommended this particular cure.[41] One of the more extreme homeopathic remedies was used to treat rabies. Since it was commonly know as "Hydrophobia" (water phobia), according to homeopathic principles the cure was water. Hence patients were to be suspended head first in water. The same cure was prescribed by J.B. van Helmont for fools, but in this case the rationale was different: the water was expected to extinguish the excessive fire in the patients. The younger van Helmont describes this cure:

> This Method of curing fools, and distracted Persons, Dr. *Richardson*, according to his own Confession, learnt out of my Father's Writings, and using the same, recovered many. The way he took was this, having stript the Parties naked, he bound their hands upon their backs, and ty'd their Feet to a Rope fastned to a Pulley for to let them down more or less deep into the Water; and then setting them upon a Bench with their Backs towards a great Vessel with Water, he pull'd them up by the Rope which was fastened to their Feet, and so let them fall with their Heads downwards to their Waste into the Water, yet so as that their heads did not touch the bottom of the Vessel, and there left them till he judged that their upper Parts were drowned; it may happen indeed that some through fear, or because they are not strong enough to stand out this Method, may miscarry and die; and therefore it is fittting that permission should be procur'd from the Magistrate for the exercising of this practice, as it is usual for cutting of the Stone, which is likewise a doubtfull Operation, and from whence all do not escape with Life. . . . And that the foresaid Doctor did cure several distracted Persons this way, there are many in *Holland* that can verifie.[42]

Probably the less said about this cure the better. The prescription of a child's urine to cure an old man's cough or shortness of breath[43] and another prescription for stallion's manure or a young stag's horn for pains in the heart were based on the belief that substances taken from the young and healthy would act sympathetically on the old and infirm.[44]

Medicine was and is such a complex subject, involving as it does biology, psychology, and chemistry, it is no wonder it lagged behind astronomy and

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[39] J.B. van Helmont describes reading Dioscorides and Matthioli in *Oriatrike*, "The Authors Studies," pp. 11-14. Pietro Andrea Matthioli's herbal was the most important natural history of plants since Dioscorides. Matthioli was born in Italy and moved to Bohemia in 1554, where he became Emperor Ferdinand's physician and counselor. On Matthioli's importance as a botanical illustrator, see Arber, *Herbals*, pp. 92-7, 221-6.

[40] *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*, p. 38.

[41] See ch. 1, p. 219 n. 68.

[42] *The Spirit of Diseases*, pp. 43-5.

[43] *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*,. p. 10. It was an old and venerable belief that the urine of young boys, particularly chaste, young boys, possessed medical virtues. This idea was accepted by Pliny in his *Natural History*.

[44] *The Spirit of Diseases*, p. 14.

physics in its development. As we have seen from a cursory review of the *Medicinà Experimentalis Helmontiana*, herbal and chemical remedies are combined with cures involving amulets, talismans, and astrology.[45] Miracles, "Deliverances," and "Providential Signs" were also very much a part of medicine in the seventeenth century as they had been in every previous century.[46] This underlines the obvious fact that for all their attempts at theorizing physicians could not be sure what caused or cured disease. Their very uncertainty may explain why the initial hostility between Galenists and iatrochemists diminished over time. Physicians were willing to try anything that appeared to work.

In the last chapter, Hayim Vital's alchemical and medical interests were briefly mentioned. Patai describes some of the approximately 1,500 recipes contained in a manuscript Vital kept adding to throughout his life. Patai argues that Vital is exceptional because his writings on alchemy are "factual, [and] technological in nature," and not in any way mystical.[47] According to Patai, the only way most Jewish alchemists could combine their alchemical interests with kabbalistic studies was to make the former secret and mysterious. He therefore regards Vital as having an unusual ability to compartmentalize. Throughout this book I have argued that the attempt to separate science and religion in the early modern period is both unproductive and in many cases impossible. Even in the case of "good" science, namely that which has stood the test of time (at least in certain respects, as in the case of Newton), the historical record is distorted if the religious aspects of scientific theories are ignored. This holds as true for Newton as it does for van Helmont, as B.J.T. Dobbs, Richard Westfall, Richard Popkin, James Force, Margaret Jacob, and many others have shown. It appears to me to be equally true of Vital. While it is true that his recipe book contains straightforward descriptions of such processes as how to: make pots in which to melt gold, expel smoke from a room, remove an oil spot from a silk dress, dye paper green, and refine gold and silver, there are also recipes that rely on incantations and charms. After one recipe to quiet a stormy sea by reciting a psalm and a magical name, Vital writes: "Tried and tested several times by the writer." Patai comments, "It is difficult to believe that these lines were written by the same man who, on the very same page, prescribes the precise and detailed chemical procedures in which religious, spiritual, magical powers have no place at all."[48] But in this respect Vital was no different from anyone else in accepting many things as true and entirely possible that we

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[45] John Worthington sent amulets from "a noble lady in Warwickshire" to protect a family against the plague. He says "they were of a dried toad (of which Van Helmont writes) a creature that is spotted, and carries the signature of this contagion" (*The Correspondence of John Worthington*, 2:183).

[46] See Cadbury's introduction to George Fox's "Book of Miracles" as well as MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England*. On one of his trips to Holland, Anne Conway asked van Helmont to verify a miraculous cure reported there. He reported that he believed it had occurred.

[47] Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 343.

[48] ibid., p. 361.

now know with hindsight to be utterly impossible. The younger van Helmont had the same mix of what we would describe as fact and fiction in his writings.

Patai suggests that Jewish alchemists, while fully conversant with Christian and Muslim alchemical theory, were unique in interpreting alchemical processes in terms of Jewish tradition.[49] But this is really only to say that Jewish alchemists recognized a religious dimension to their studies. Christian and Muslim alchemists did the same; the only difference was in regard to what religious texts were venerated. In many cases Jewish, Christian, and Muslims used the same religious text, that of the Hebrew Bible, revered in all three traditions, while in the case of Christian Kabbalists and alchemists kabbalistic texts were also utilized. Hence in all three alchemical traditions religion and religious texts were of primary importance.

It used to be thought that just as medical schools were acrimoniously divided into separate camps, so too were different schools of natural philosophy. For example, Aristotelians supposedly distinguished themselves from atomists and mechanical philosophers, while these, in turn, drew the line when it came to occultists and vitalists. However, as has been suggested at repeated points throughout this book, recent work in history and the history of science has shown that the division between Aristotelians, mechanical philosophers, vitalists, or occultists was much less clear-cut than once imagined; nor was there a straight-forward correlation between specific scientific theories and corresponding religious and political beliefs. Keith Hutchison's article, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution" may appear to qualify this statement, for he argues that the recognition that occult qualities existed and were amenable to study separated occult and mechanical philosophers from Aristotelians and marked a significant advance in science. By identifying the occult with the insensible and hence incorporeal and spiritual, Aristotelians limited science to the study of what was apparent to the human senses, thus ignoring the huge realm of insensible entities revealed by the microscope and telescope. The traditional idea that the scientific revolution entailed a turn towards the realm of sense experience and empirical observation is inaccurate; it can be better described as a foray into "non-sense," which explains why the seventeenth century naturalist Henry Power castigated Aristotelians for being "Sons of Sens" instead of

[49] "The value of the treatise [Esh M'saref] lies primarily in typifying a specifically Jewish, kabbalistically oriented, trend in alchemy, which differed considerably from the alchemical methodology as practiced by most Muslim and Christian alchemists. We find in its presentation of alchemical theory and procedure an organic connection between alchemy on the one hand and biblical, Talmudic, and kabbalistic tradition on the other. By interpreting biblical passages alchemically, our author has, in true alchemical fashion, transmuted the bible into an alchemical source book. In his view, a true master of alchemy had to be conversant not only with run-of-the-mill alchemical techniques, mythologies, and theories about nature, but also with Jewish tradition; and, over and above all this, he had to be a moral, pious, God-fearing Jew" (Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 335).

experimental philosophers.[50] In his recognition that occult forces can be studied even if they are imperfectly understood, van Helmont, a vitalist and occultist, was in the progressive camp. As he says, ". . . many. . . things, that we meet with, we do know by their operations, do exist, tho' we know them not with all their properties."[51] This, of course, was the argument Newton used to defend himself against Leibniz's charge that gravity was an "occult" force. In this respect, then, van Helmont was progressive, but as we have also seen, both he and his father were deeply influenced by the Aristotelian notion that form was an inherent aspect of matter. Hence it clearly was possible to combine aspects of Aristotelianism with occultism.

Evidence continually mounts to show that early modern natural philosophers had many different allegiances. Only this can explain the friendships and connections Francis Mercury had while in England and on the continent with scientists and philosophers with widely differing, yet often overlapping, views. Hartlib, Oldenburg, Comenius, Locke, Boyle, Leibniz, and Newton are all names that come up in connection with the younger van Helmont. Religion and science were thoroughly intermixed in the thinking of all these men, and whether they were vitalists, occultists, or mechanical philosophers they shared the conviction that active, spiritual forces of some sort existed in matter.[52] The epistemological dispute therefore did not lie in admitting or rejecting spiritual forces in nature but in agreeing as to exactly what kind of spiritual forces existed and how they worked.[53] It is this kind of confusion that explains how a follower of Mesmer in the eighteenth century could claim that among those authors whose works "have some analogy with Mesmerism" were "Locke, Bacon, Bayle, Leibniz, Hume, Newton, Descartes, La Mettrie, Bonnet, Diderot, Maupertuis, Robinet, Helvétius, Condillac, J.-J. Rousseau, Buffon, Marat, Bertholon."[54]

The mechanical philosophy did not triumph in the seventeenth century, nor did it triumph in the eighteenth. The extent to which the theories characteristic of Paracelsus and both van Helmonts continued to find adherents in the eighteenth, nineteenth (and, dare one say, twentieth) centuries has become increasingly clear. As Robert Darnton pointed out in his pioneering work on Mersmerism, vitalistic theories like Mesmer's were eagerly embraced in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and the predilection for spiritualist cosmologies on the part of elite and popular culture alike prepared the way for Romanticism. Mesmer's critics recognized that his ideas were directly derived from Paracelsus, J.B. van Helmont, and Robert Fludd,

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[50] Henry Power, *Experimental Philosophy*, preface; cited in Hutchison, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?" p. 239. Cf. Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*; Wilson, *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope.*

[51] *Divine Attributes*, p. 2.

[52] Schaffer, "Godly Men"; Henry, "Occult Qualities and the Experimental Philosophy: Active Principles in Pre-Newtonian Matter Theory."

[53] Coudert, "Henry More and Witchcraft."

[54] This list appears in *Appel au public sur le magnétisme animal* (1787), p. 49. Cited in Darnton, *Mesmerism*, p. 38.

but this awareness did nothing to decrease Mesmer's popularity since his ideas had a great deal in common with the theories about electricity, magnetism, gravity, light, and fire proposed by "respectable" authors. Mechanical explanations failed to give an adequate or even plausible account of the wondrous effects of these invisible forces reported assiduously in the popular press. Chemists claimed to resurrect the forms of plants and animals by heating their calcinated ashes in hermetically sealed flasks, and books were published with ghostly images of these reconstituted beings.[55] Electrical charges were said to make plants grow and cure gout. A young boy supposedly regained the full use of his limbs after being thrown daily into a tub with a large electric eel.[56] The fact that scientific and pseudo-scientific explanations of the same phenomena were generally similar made it all the more difficult for ordinary people to distinguish fact from fiction. Goethe's Faust was a product of the eighteenth century, not the Middle Ages, and he appealed to an eighteenth and nineteenth century audience. People have always been drawn to the marvelous, and, paradoxically, the more science discovered, the more gullible and credulous a portion at least of the general public became. In his last book Carl Sagan lamented the fact that people preferred the pseudo-marvels of pseudo-science to actual wonders of real science.[57] But as Robin Dunbar argues, real science is too difficult for most human beings, who have been programmed to have a "social" rather than a "scientific" brain.[58]

Long before Sagan and Dunbar, Anne Conway's bother, John Finch, recognized the difficulty most people have distinguishing between true and false science. In Finch's letter to his sister he concluded this was what accounted for van Helmont's inflated reputation. As he says: "the most part of Mankind being fooles and not able to judge, the knowledge of a few wise men will easily be outvoted by a Number of Talkers."[59] Finch goes on to suggest criteria for distinguishing truth from falsehood. He advises Anne to give credence only to those people who relate things on the basis of their own experience, who are known to possess good judgment, and whose opinion is not swayed by self interest. But that, of course, was exactly the rub faced by people at the time van Helmont lived (as well as ever after). What counted for reliably reported experience and good, unbiased judgment, especially when what was at issue was invisible to the naked eye or senses? The verdict on Francis Mercury van Helmont in this regard was far from unanimous, but he did have good friends and admirers across the philosophical and scientific spectrum

It is not possible to reconstruct exactly which philosophers and scientists van Helmont knew in his years in England. From references in the *Conway*

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[55] Debus, *The French Paracelsians*, pp. 161ff; François Secret, "Palingenesis, Alchemy and Metempsychosis in Renaissance Medicine."

[56] Darnton, *Mesmerism*, p. 14.

[57] Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World.*

[58] Dunbar, *The Trouble with Science,* ch.7.

[59] *CL*, p. 87.

Letters it is clear that he spent time in London and that Boyle met him and spoke about him to More and visa versa.[60] As a young man Boyle had been involved with members of the Hartlib circle, who had adopted Helmontian theories. The idea that Boyle renounced Helmontian chemistry in favor of the mechanical philosophy when he moved to Oxford in 1655 has been effectively challenged by Antonio Clericuzio.[61] Clericuzio argues that it was only in the eighteenth century and largely as a result of Leibniz that Boyle was taken to symbolize the mechanical philosophy. This view of Boyle ignores the fact that he admitted there were non-mechanical forces in the natural world, such as spirits, seminal principles, and ferments, which had the power to fashion matter.[62] After the publication of his *Skeptical Chymist*, Boyle did become increasingly critical of certain of van Helmont's ideas, for example, the notion that water was the source of everything, but he never rejected Helmontian chemistry as a whole. What he did instead is to reinterpret many of van Helmont's idea in terms of corpuscular philosophy.[63] Boyle's contemporaries understood what he was attempting. In a letter to Oldenburg dated February 20, 1659/60, Robert Southwell writes: "I am extreame glad to understand that Mr Boyle is ingaged in soe advantagious a designe as ye collation of Chymicall experiments with Atomicall notions. He is a person of soe much ability, and soe much caution withall, that I doe not think he would have publisht unto you his designe without haveing made some successfull and happy essay therein allready."[64] Boyle publicly announced his intentions in the preface to the fourth edition of his *Certain Physiological Essays* (1661), where he proposed "the Desirableness of a Good Intelligence betwixt the Corpuscularian Philosophers and the Chymists." Clericuzio maintains that by the 1670s "Helmontian theories, . . . interpreted in the light of the particulate theory of matter had become an integral part of natural philosophy."[65] Boyle was not the only major scientist to accept Helmontian theories. Leibniz did as well, a subject discussed in a later chapter.

The integration of Helmontian theories into natural philosophy helps to explain the fact that a number of Helmontians became members of the Royal Society, for example William Simpson, who had been a staunch supporter of the Helmontians against the Galenists in the pamphlet war of 1665. Simpson wrote a tract on fermentation, which he dedicated to Lord Brouncker, the

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[60] *CL*, pp. 318, n. 16, pp. 333, 335,

[61] This was the contention of both Marie Boas Hall and Thomas Kuhn. For a different interpretation, see Clericuzio, "From van Helmont to Boyle. A study of the Transmission of Helmontian Chemical and Medical Theories in Seventeenth-century England"; idem, "A Redefinition of Boyle's Chemistry and Corpuscular Philosophy"; idem, "Robert Boyle and the English Helmontians."

[62] Clericuzio, "A Redefinition of Boyle's Chemistry," p. 563.

[63] Clericuzio, "From van Helmont to Boyle," p. 306. Walton, "Boyle and Newton on the Transmutation of Water and Air. From the Root of van Helmont's Tree." See Also Westfall, "Newton and the Hermetic Tradition," p. 187

[64] *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, I:355.

[65] Clericuzio, "From van Helmont to Boyle," p. 330.

President of the Royal Society and patron of Helmontian chemists.[66] Brouncker's chemical interests account for the invitation he extended to Knorr von Rosenroth to become one of the Royal Society over-seas correspondents. A draft of Knorr's reply to Brouncker exists.[67] In it he passes on information about the Helmontian Alkahest, the miraculous universal solvent that excited the interest of many chemists including Boyle.[68] John Webster was another Helmontian, who became a member of the Royal Society. He published his *Metallographia, or a History of Metals* in 1671 and dedicated the work to Prince Rupert, who was also a fellow of the Royal Society. Webster took the Helmontian position that metals grew in the earth from seeds. In terms of both his scientific and linguistic theories as well as his friendship with Prince Rupert, Webster and Francis Mercury van Helmont had a lot in common. Dr. Daniel Foote was another Helmontian member of the Royal Society. He acted as one of van Helmont's many amanuenses and the notes of his conversations with van Helmont survive in the British Library.[69] Henry Stubbe may not have been off the mark when he complained to Boyle that the Royal Society was subverting traditional learning by taking the side of Helmontians.[70] One can only conclude that iatrochemistry did well in Restoration England, supported as it was by such figures as the President of the Royal Society, Lord Brounker, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon, the Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, and last but hardly least, Charles II.[71]

From other sources, we know that van Helmont was closely associated with the Secretary of the Royal Society, Henry Oldenburg. Oldenburg first met van Helmont in 1658, a meeting he described in the letter to Boyle quoted in Chapter One. Oldenburg wrote a non-committal review of van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature* for the *Philosophical Transactions* (no. 31, January 6, 167/8). A few weeks earlier, he had written to Boyle, telling him he had received van Helmont's book and adding "wch, I doubt, will prove no great commendation to it."[72] Oldenburg's dismissive attitude changed radically over the next several years. On August 5, 1671, he writes to Leibniz, asking for clarification on points in his recent letter. He suggests that Leibniz give his reply to van Helmont, who by this point has become a close friend: "Moreover as the distinguished Van Helmont, who is very closely bound to me by friendship, will soon be returning among us you can, if you please, safely intrust to him whatever it may occur to you to write or communicate to myself."[73] After van Helmont's death, Leibniz remarked that van

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[66] William Simpson, *Zymologia pysica, or a Brief Philosophical Discourse of Fermentation* (London, 1675).

[67] Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf 30.4. Extrav. Angtrags-Nr, fol. 10v.

[68] Clericuzio, "A Redefinition of Boyle's Chemistry and Corpuscular Philosophy," p. 565.

[69] London, British Library, Sloane MSS 530, 617.

[70] Stubbe to Boyle, May 18, 1670. *Works*, I: xciii; cited in Clericuzio, "From van Helmont to Boyle, p. 329.

[71] ibid., p. 319.

[72] *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, January 7, 1667/8, IV: 102-3.

[73] ibid., VIII: 182-3.

Helmont's published writings did not do him justice.[74] Perhaps Oldenburg's personal meetings with van Helmont after his arrival in England in 1670 account for his change of attitude.

In Oldenburg's correspondence there are further references to other mutual friends of van Helmont. Joachim Poleman, who became one of Christian August's chief advisers at van Helmont's recommendation, is mentioned in a number of letters referring to Polemen's Helmontian chemical treatise, *Novum Lumen Medicum*, which was dedicated to Christian August (another Helmontian). The *Novum Lumen* created a considerable stir in England. Southwell informs Oldenburg that "Mr Polemans Novum Lumen Medicum is exceedingly desired in this place, and the Translator at London wants not a great many earnest wishes to ye successe and dispatch of that worke.[75] Oldenburg encouraged Hartlib to correspond with Poleman. As he says in a letter dated July 23, 1659: "Yr last. . . gave me cause to be glad of ye correspondence you have begun with Mr. Poleman, who hath ye repute of a skillful man in nature and chymistry."[76] Jean d'Aubry, with whom van Helmont corresponded, was another Paracelsian/Helmontian physician mentioned in Oldenburg's correspondence. Oldenburg describes a meeting in d'Aubry's house in Paris in March, 1660, during which the participants discussed chemical matters and were regaled with tales of transmutation by Sir Kenelm Digby.[77] Oldenburg also corresponded with Peter Serrarius, the Dutch Collegiant, millenarian, and Christian follower of Sabbatai Sevi, who was also a friend of van Helmont, and he knew van Helmont's close friend Tobias Ludwig Kohlhans, one of the many people who came to the Sulzbach court because of van Helmont.[78] Oldenburg also mentions the leader of the Dutch Collegiants, Adam Boreel, who had been instrumental in translating the Mishnah into Latin.[79] After Boreel's death, Boyle helped to pay for the transcriptions of Boreel's extant writings.[80] One of Boreel's poems "On the Love of Pain," dedicated to Anne Conway, ended up among Locke's papers at the Bodleian. Henry More translated another of Boreel's hymns into English and included it in his edition of Glanvil's *Lux Orientalis* and Rust's *Discourse of Truth*.[81] One day we shall perhaps know the full extent of the

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[74] Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, especially ch. 2.

[75] *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, I: 355.

[76] ibid., I: 288. A manuscript exists in the British Library (Sloane MS. 648, fol. 46) entitled "for his Loving Friend Mr. Samuel Hartlib the Elder, written by Polemann. Polemann was reputed to have transmuted mercury into silver and gold (*The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, (I: 352) and Southwell sends two of Polemann's cures to Hartlib, one for "Erysipelle," which consists of camphor dissolved in spirit of wine, and the other for a "gal'd horse" (ibid., I: 355). For the links between Polemann, Hartlib, and Comenius, see G. H. Turnball, *Hartlib, Comenius and Dury*.

[77] *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, I: 362. In an earlier letter (March 10, 1659/60) Oldenburg mentions "Aubery" and his discourse on dissolving gold.

[78] ibid., III: 446.

[79] Popkin and van der Wall, "Samuel Hartlib, John Worthington and John Dury on Adam Boreel's Latin Translation of the Mishnah (1659-1661)."

[80] *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, II: 509, 534, 545, 556, 570, 603, III: 18.

[81] *Two Choice and Useful Treatises*, pp. 271-76.

interactions of all these people, who, on the surface, appear to have little in common.

Oldenburg also translated von Rosenroth's book on Revelations into English in 1671, most probably at the instigation of van Helmont.[82] Perhaps it was through Oldenburg or Theodore Haak, another member of the Royal Society, who, like van Helmont, provided services for Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate, that van Helmont's paper on "Pawn Shops" came into the Royal Society's archives.

Throughout his life van Helmont styled himself a Seeker. Although he had a reputation for possessing the philosopher's stone and medicines of extraordinary potency, he never made false claims about his accomplishments. In 1680 Leibniz told a correspondent that he did not think van Helmont knew the secret of transmutation precisely because of the long talks they had some eight years earlier.[83] The fact that van Helmont was so candid with Leibniz was one of the reasons Leibniz valued their discussions. Van Helmont exhibited the same modesty when he was entreated by an admirer to share the secret of a certain powder reputed to be a universal medicine. The episode is interesting because it provides evidence for van Helmont's reputation as a miracle worker balanced against his own more modest self-assessment.

The episode occurred toward the end of van Helmont's life in 1696. Sophie, the Electress of Hanover, with whom van Helmont had been staying earlier in the year, received an intriguing letter from a certain Abbé de Lessing, who was actually writing on behalf of a third party, the Princess de Chimay. The letter reveals the full extent of van Helmont's reputation as an adept and doctor with miraculous medicines. It provides a vivid picture of the magical, even demonic, powers associated with anyone thought to have exceptional healing skills:

> Having found myself lately, Madam, in Brussels in a group among whom was the Princess de Chimay, of the Bossu family, someone began talking about Sr. de Helmont, why I don't know. She led me apart and began to give me—I do not know if it was a eulogy or a critique of the life of that man. The conclusion is that she told me in detail what she knew of this man, who has marvelous secrets in medicine and other things. But she told me that this made him a wanderer for fear that someone would steal his secrets. There was one to which the Princess told me he gave different names, but which all those who have seen its miraculous effects baptize Diaphoretic Mercury, [84] which is a skin-colored powder.
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> As for me, Madam, I am a man of the world, perhaps, who believes very little in these sorts of secrets. Besides, it could easily be that I write nothing to your illustrious Electress which you wouldn't know without this. But the Princess de Chimay asked me so insistently to write to you and to assure you that this powder is a treasure which has no price, the prodigious effects of

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[82] *A Genuine Explication of the visions of the book of Revelation. . .* by the learned A.B. Peganius, English'd out of High Dutch by H.O.

[83] AK I, 3: 442

[84] Producing perspiration.

> which she has seen, and to implore you not to lose the chance to have the secret from Sr. de Helmont, or a least the powder, that I could not refuse this good lady's request, to take this liberty . . . .[85]

Shortly after the Electress received Abbé de Lessing's letter, Leibniz wrote to van Helmont on her instructions. Although much more of a skeptic than the Princess of Chimay, Leibniz did not dismiss the possibility that such a medicine might exist:

> You see, Monsieur, from what I just told you about the letter which Madam the Electress received from Brussels, that Madam the Princess of Chimay infinitely esteems your secret. Madam the Electress directed me to write to you about what is said about this, and you tell us what you judge appropriate. It is not always necessary to disabuse people. On the contrary, the good opinion that they have about a remedy augments its effect. Besides, I readily believe that you have singular things both in medicine and in other matters which merit esteem. Madam, the Princess of Chimay, wishes that one might have at least some of the powder, even without the secret. She doesn't ask so much for herself but she advises us not to lose the opportunity to obtain secrets and remedies of importance. I admire the curiosity of the lady, and I prefer people of this character to those who are both ignorant and suspicious of things they know nothing about.[86]

In van Helmont's reply to Leibniz, he says that he never pretended to have a "universal medicine," but that the medicine the Princess asks for is "good" and that he does know how to prepare it:

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[85] LBr 389, f. 73 " (La Haye ce 1er de Dec. 1696): M'ayant trouvé dernierement, Madame, dans une compagnie à Bruxelles, ou estoit la Princesse de Chimay, de la famille de Bossu, je ne scay comme l'on vint à parler du Sr. de Helmont. Elle me prit à part, et se mit à me faire je ne scay se c'estoit un Eloge, ou une critique de la vie de cet homme là. La conclusion est, q'elle me dit le connoistre particulierement pour un homme, qui a des secrets merveilleux en matiere de Medecine, et d'autres choses; mais que cela le rend errant, me tesmoignant que c'est par crainte qu'on attrape les Secrets. Il en a un, [à ce que la Princesse me dit] auquel il donne des differens noms, mais lequel aussi tous ceux, qui en ont veu les experiences miraculeuses, baptisent pour le Mercure Diaphoretique, qui est une poudre de couleur de chair.

Pour moy, Madame, je suis l'homme du monde peut-estre qui croit le moins à ces sortes de Secrets. D'Ailleurs il se peut aisement que je n'escrive rien à V.A.S.E qu'Elle me sâche sans cela. Mais la Princesse de Chimay m'a prié si instamment d'en escrire à V.A.E; de l'asseurer que cette poudre est un tresor qui n'a point de prix, et dont elle a veu des effets prodigieux; et de la supplier de ne pas perdre l'occasion d'avoir du Sr. de Helmont le Secret, ou au moins la Poudre, que je ne puis refuser à cette bonne Dame de me donner cetter Liberté et d'asseurer par cette occasion V.A.E que je suis

A Steffani Abbé de Lessing."

[86] ibid., fol. 74 (4/14 Decembr. 1696): "Vous voyés, Monsieur, par ce que je viens de vous rapporter de la Lettre, que Mad. l'Electrice a recue de Bruxelles, que Mad. la Princesse de Chimay estime infiniment vostre Secret. Mad. l'Eletrice m'a ordonné de vous écrire ce qui s'en dit, et vous nous en dirés ce que vous jugerés à propos; et ce que vous voudrés que nous disions. Il n'est pas toujours necessaire de desabuser les gens. Au contraire la bonne opinion qu'ils ont des remedes en augmente l'effect. Outre que je crois aisement, que vous avés des choses singulieres, et qui meritent d'estre estimées, tant sur la Medecine que sur d'autres sujets. Mad. la Princesse de Chimay souhaiteroit, qu'on put avoir au mois quelque chose de la poudre au defaut du Secret. Elle ne demande pas tant ces choses pour elle meme, qu'elle nous conseille nous memes de ne pas perdre l'occasion d'obtenir des Secrets ou remedes de cette importance. J'estime la curiosité de cette Dame, et je prefere les gens de ce caractère à ceux, qui ont en meme temps de l'ignorance et du mépris pour ce qu'ils ne scavent point."

> The medicine that Madame, the Princess of Chimay and many others ask for is not universal. But it is good and is prepared from cinnabar found in Hungary and also by the Neckar in the Palatine. I learned about this from Dr. Faust, the elder, a professor at Heidelberg. I have found it in the past for sale in Amsterdam, where one sells it in the manner of Holland for a great price. If it could be obtained from the Neckar it would be convenient. I have used mine up. I will be able to tell you how to prepare it and its effects at our meeting.[87]

For all his disclaimers, van Helmont was besieged as a medical *Wunderkind* throughout his life. His reputation was such that charlatans and mountebanks got rich by promising extraordinary cures in his name. Prince Rupert had a hand in detecting one such disreputable character.[88]

Notwithstanding his medical reputation, in Anne Conway's case van Helmont failed as a physician. Exactly what medicines he prescribed remain a mystery. There are several recipes for headache in the *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*, one using a "yellow amber powder. . . given in broth or warm wine" and another involving bandaging the head with the herb pennyroyal: ". . . Green Pennyroyal laid under the hair upon the crown of the head or worn as a wreath, with the cap bound over it, and daily renewed until relieved." Another recipe for a "Chronic Headache, severe enough to cause the patient to become frantic" seems more appropriate and apparently did cure at least one female patient: "A woman had indescribable pain several weeks, and was cured by holding water in the mouth in which Hen-bane seeds had been boiled. It is also well to gargle with the same. This she did for about an hour when the pain completely left her."[89] None of these recipes sound particularly promising; nor did they prove to be.

Anne Conway's own comments about van Helmont's ministrations are probably as close as anyone will come to the actual truth of what occurred. In a letter to her brother-in-law, Sir George Rawdon, written four years after

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[87] LBr 389, fol. 82 ((Borg le 1/11 Mars 1697): " . . .NB. La Medecine que Madame la Princesse de Chimay et plusiers autres demandent n'est pas universelle; mais elle est bonne et se prepare d'un Cinabre mineral, qui se trouve en Hongrie, comme aussi au Necker dans le Palatinat. J'en avois recu du Docteur Faust le Vieux, Professeur à Heydelberg. Je l'ay autrefois trouvé à vendre à Amsterdam ou on le vendoit à la mode de Hollande à grand prix. Si on le pouvoit avoir de Necker ce seroit commode. Je me suis defait du mien. Je pourray Vous en communiquer la preparation et la vertu à nostre entrevue."

[88] The person to whom van Helmont dictated the *Paradoxal Discourses* describes this situation in the preface: ". . . we had a great desire, of having his Picture engraven in Copper printed in the front of this book, to the end that a stop might be put to the cheats of many, who make use of his Name to deceive people, and their fraud detected. Forasmuch as the same was done, to my knowledge, by a certain person at Paris about five years since, who pretended to great and extraordinary Cures, and at first by this means got great sums of money; but afterwards was fain to slip away in secret; whereas it is notorious that Van Helmont never received either money or monieworth for the like or any other testifications of Friendship.

In like manner we have heard of another here in London, a Lieutenant-Colonel, who pretended to have married his sister, and that by this means he had obtained many rare and excellent Medicines; but when Prince Rupert in presence of the said Van Helmont, did send for this Lieutenant-Colonel to come to him and speak with his Brother-in-Law, he excused himself, and withal declared, that what was reported of him was a mistake, and that it was not his Sister, but a Servant of the House whom he had married."

[89] *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*, p. 2.

van Helmont's arrival at Ragley, she says that while his medicines appear to have some effect, his company has far more:

> To your kinde enquiry after what ease I find from Monsieur van Hellmont, I must give this account, my paines and weakness does certainely increase daily, but yett I doubt not, but I have had some releef (God be thanked) from his medicines, I am sure more then I ever had from ye endeavours of any person whatseover else, but yett I have had much more satisfaction in his company, he has yett ye patience to continue with mee in my solitude, wch makes it ye easier to mee, none of my own relations having ye patience to doe it in ye circumstances that I am in, wch makes my obligations to him so much ye greater.[90]

However painful her headaches and for all her solitude Anne Conway's existence was not uneventful during the years of van Helmont's residency at Ragley. She carried on an active intellectual life that brought her into contact with some of the greatest minds of the age. Through van Helmont she became conversant with the doctrines of the Lurianic Kabbalah and from that stepping stone, she entered into the world of the Quakers, astonishing and wholly unexpected things for a woman in her position. As far as I am aware, Anne Conway was the first female Christian Kabbalist and if she was not the first female member of the nobility to become a Quaker, she was one of the first. How she managed to be so accomplished—women simply did not discourse about the Kabbalah or read Latin and Greek (and even, perhaps, a bit of Hebrew) at the time unless they were truly exceptional—and how in her incapacitated state she had the courage to join a sect of generally despised outcasts is the subject of the following chapter.

[90] *CL*, 9 August 1674, p. 534.

CHAPTER NINE

ANNE CONWAY: KABBALIST AND QUAKER

Anne Conway was an extraordinary figure in a remarkable age. She was all the more exceptional because of her achievements as a woman living during an intensely patriarchal century when women's opportunities were severely restricted and their roles primarily that of wife and mother. Anne Conway's accomplishments as a student of philosophy and theology, her mastery of the intricate doctrines of the Lurianic Kabbalah, and her authorship of a treatise criticizing Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza on kabbalistic grounds wildly exceeded the abilities of all but a tiny fraction of her female contemporaries. Her radical, indeed scandalous, conversion to the despised sect of Quakers further revealed an independence of mind wholly unexpected (and unwanted) in women at the time.

Anne Finch (Anne Conway's maiden name) was born into one distinguished family and married into another. Her father, Sir Heange Finch, had a distinguished political career as Sergeant-at-Law, Recorder of the City of London, and Speaker of the House of Commons. He died a week before Anne's birth on December 14, 1631, leaving her mother (his second wife), Elizabeth Cradock, with one other daughter and nine step-sons and daughters. The eldest of Anne's step-brothers, also named Heneage, followed in his father's footsteps and was appointed to the high political offices of Solicitor General, Attorney General, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and Lord High Chancellor. In 1681 he was created Earl of Nottingham.

As was customary for girls, Anne Finch received no formal education. She was, however, tutored at home, learning Latin and a smattering of Greek and perhaps Hebrew, a very unusual program of study for a female. Her earliest letters reveal her broad but unchanneled intellectual interests and her voracious reading. It was this aspect of her character that attracted the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, who became her mentor and friend. More had been the tutor of John Finch, Anne's favorite step-brother, at Christ's College, Cambridge, and through this relationship More became acquainted with Anne. In 1650 the two began to correspond about the philosophy of Descartes. It was quite natural that Anne should turn to More for guidance on this subject because he was at that point Descartes' chief disciple in England.

More's close relationship with Anne Conway continued after her marriage to Edward Conway (1623-1683) on February 11, 1651. In 1652 More dedicated his *Antidote against Atheism* to her, describing her as "Vertue become visible to his outward Sight,"[1] words that indicate his devotion and

[1] Dedication to the *Antidote Against Atheism*.

admiration. In their early letters More is very much the tutor and Conway his "heroine pupil," as he called her. But over time the character of their relationship changed. The subject of their correspondence branched out into other areas and as the years passed they became intellectual equals. More was always the first to praise the acuity of Anne Conway's intellect. He claimed that he had "scarce ever met with any Person, Man or Woman, of better Natural parts than Lady Conway."[2] Their relationship lasted until her death, although it became more distant, even strained, during the last four years of her life because of the increasingly radical nature of her theological and philosophical ideas.

Edward Conway succeeded his father as third Viscount Conway in 1655 and took over the management of the large family estates in Ireland and England. He too had a distinguished political career, becoming Secretary of State under Charles the II. It was in this capacity that he interceded for some of his wife's Quaker associates who had been thrown into jail, a subject discussed later in the chapter. Anne and Edward Conway had only one child, Heneage Edward Conway, who died of small pox in 1660 before his second birthday. After Anne's death in 1679, Edward Conway was created Earl of Conway. Although he married two more times, he died without issue and his estates were passed to relatives, who assumed the Conway name.

While Edward Conway shared his wife's philosophical interests, he was hardly prepared for the intellectual and spiritual odyssey that took her from Cartesian philosophy into the folds of Quakerism via the Lurianic Kabbalah. Aristocratic women simply did not study Latin, Greek and Hebrew, nor write philosophical treatises. In fact, if they did, they opened themselves up to the kind of ridicule Ben Jonson aimed at a female character in the *Alchemist* for her linguistic pretensions:

> If you but name a word touching the Hebrew,
> She falls into her fit, and will discourse
> So learnedly of genealogies,
> As you would run mad too, to hear her, Sir (II, i).[3]

Converting to Quakerism was even worse inasmuch as the sect was despised equally for its political radicalism and religious unorthodoxy. That Anne Conway engaged in all these activities while suffering from increasing debilitating headaches makes her story as poignant as it is fascinating.

The major source for reconstructing the life of Anne Conway and restoring her to the historical record comes from the treasure-trove of family letters discovered first by Horace Walpole in a discarded trunk and studied later by Marjorie Hope Nicolson. Nicolson brought Anne Conway and the members of her circle back to life in her edition of the *Conway Letters*

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[2] Ward, *Life of Henry More*, p. 193.

[3] Being taken for a blue stocking was just about the worst thing that could happen to a woman. The cautionary figure of "Mad Madge," the Duchess of Newcastle, was there as a terrible warning to dampen the aspirations of any would-be female intellectual.

(1930).[4] These letters offer a vivid picture of this highly unusual woman wrestling with theological and philosophical problems engendered by the Reformation and the "new science." Henry More acted as her guide as she pondered the religious and philosophical implications of the "mechanical" philosophy, as it came to be called, that is until van Helmont usurped his place. Ironically, as we have seen, Anne Conway met van Helmont through More.

Van Helmont and Conway became close friends and intellectual collaborators. Under van Helmont's tutelage, she began to study the Lurianic Kabbalah. During this period she wrote a philosophical treatise which shows how committed she became to this form of Kabbalah. This work, discussed more fully below, is arguably the most philosophically interesting work written by a woman in the seventeenth century, not only as the record of a woman trying to understand the reason for her own intense suffering but because of the radical and unorthodox conclusions she came to as she tried to answer the most pressing theological and philosophical questions of the day. Anne Conway's small treatise offers a valiant attempt to come to terms with the problematic features of Christianity, especially in its post-Reformation forms. Her work is essentially a theodicy, an attempt to justify God's goodness and affirm his justice on impregnable, kabbalistic grounds. But all this lay in the future.

In the year van Helmont and Conway took the decisive step and declared themselves Quakers, 1677, Knorr von Rosenroth published the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata*, a work with which, as we have seen, van Helmont was closely associated. The two events were more than coincidental, however. It was as a result of meeting a leading Quaker spokesman, George Keith, that van Helmont and Anne Conway concluded the Kabbalah and Quakerism were compatible. For reasons discussed in the course of this chapter, Keith became fascinated with the Kabbalah. His enthusiasm convinced van Helmont and Conway that they had at last found a practicing religious group receptive to their optimistic, ecumenical philosophy. On what eventually turned out to be a mistaken assumption, they became Quakers. Van Helmont's trip to the Conway house, Ragley, thus initiated a series of events that were to have profound effects on the lives of his three closest English friends, Anne Conway herself, Henry More, and George Keith. These four interacted in a drama of great personal significance for each one of them; but it was a drama that also had repercussions within the Society of Quakers as a whole. The story does not simply involve the conversion of a Belgian Baron and noble Lady to a despised sect when religion was still a fighting issue; it encompasses the apostasy of a leading Quaker spokesman and turmoil within the Quaker society itself.

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[4] Fortunately, this collection has been recently reissued with a new introduction and the inclusion of some new material by Hutton. For information about Conway, see the articles by Hutton, Gabbey, and Simonutti in the bibliography. Merchant was the first to argue for the importance of Anne Conway and for her impact on Leibniz. See also the collection of articles on Conway in the *Guilford Review* 23 (1986).

Anne Conway was the only one of the four for whom the affair had a satisfying conclusion. Tormented by increasingly severe physical pain, she at last found comfort within the Quaker fold and died before she could witness the ensuing conflicts her three friends in part fomented. Henry More, too, died before he could see the results his influence was to have. Keith, the most brilliant and best educated of all the Quakers, was to be branded as an apostate, and van Helmont, the friend of Robert Barclay and William Penn, censured as the man responsible for the "pernicious error."[5] There were to be "Keithians" and "Helmontians," each with their staunch supporters and bitter antagonists.

A major cause of all this strife and enmity was the Kabbalah, the doctrine van Helmont had envisioned as the harbinger of peace and concord. Van Helmont's belief in the Kabbalah as a means to religious unity should have been dashed as the Quakers repudiated both him and his doctrine. However, he never lost faith in its value for Christians. After Anne Conway's death and after his separation from the Quakers, van Helmont was more prolific than ever, setting out in print again and again the same doctrines he had held from the beginning of his collaboration with Knorr, with only minor alterations and additions. The Kabbalah, then, was the stepping-stone that led van Helmont to become a Quaker.

Van Helmont had already been struck by the behavior of the Quakers eleven years before his arrival at Ragley when he had met several members of the sect at Heidelberg. The interest this earlier encounter had sparked was soon to be encouraged, for when he arrived at Ragley in December, 1670 as Anne Conway's physician, he was to find his interest shared by his patient.

During the years before van Helmont's arrival, Conway had been reading the works of Henry Nicholas, the founder of the "Family of Love." The Familists, as they came to be called, emerged as a group during the sixteenth century. The main doctrine preached by Nicholas centered on love. He described love as the "light of the world" and the "bread of life," and to "live in love" was to live according to the divine commandments. Nicholas believed that men could completely conquer sin and become divine.

The literature on the Familists is not extensive,[6] but what has been written suggests that the Family of Love was more akin to a secret society than to a distinct religious sect. Its appeal cut across the traditional division between Catholics and Protestants (although its members continued to describe themselves as either), and among its adherents were several well-known and influential intellectuals and Churchmen.

It is difficult to say exactly how many Familists there were in England during the 1660s. Their number had little to do with the extreme distrust and suspicion in which they were held. They became the butt of repeated attacks

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[5] This was a reference to the Lurianic doctrine of metempsychosis.

[6] Van Dorsten, *Thomas Basson*; Kissop, "The Family of Love in France"; Reckers, *Benito Arias Montano*; de la Fontaine Verwey, "De Geschriften van H. Nicolaes"; Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630.*

in the seventeenth century, a convenient group on which to heap all the fury and disgust which the orthodox had for deviant sects. The Quakers with their emphasis on love and their rejection of the established Church were considered as offsprings of this heretical sect and roundly condemned along with them.[7]

The Familists became a principal topic in the letters between Henry More and Anne Conway in 1669 and 1670.[8] More stands in the role of critic while Anne questions him and urges him to read more. Perhaps it was because More, like so many of his contemporaries, repeatedly bracketed the Familists and Quakers together in his blanket condemnation of enthusiasm and sectarianism that Anne Conway first began to take an interest in the Quakers. If this were, indeed, the case, it would have fascinating ramifications, for not only were the Familists repeatedly linked to the Quakers but they had much earlier connections with Kabbbalists and Mennonites as well. William Postel had been a member of the Family of Love. Arias Montanus was another crypto-Familist, and this is particularly interesting because van Helmont knew about his work on the Polyglot Bible and was apparently interested in making a new translation along the same lines. Van Helmont's Quaker friend, Benjamin Furly, describes this project in a letter to John Locke in February, 1691. He seems to suggest, jovially to be sure, that there is something suspicious about van Helmont's association with Mennonite preachers and a disaffected Calvinist, coupled with his sudden interest in Arias Montanus:

> . . . our old Friend I beleeve has quited Rotterdam almost for a full doe, but he is since, a wandering Hermit, he is now in his fourth Lodging. He soone quitted Galenus'es, then went to another Mennists; fell in with a censured minister of the Calvinist party, who I presume has received his Doctrine. He is to translate him a N.T. [New Testament] into Dutch, Interlinear as Arias Montanus in Latin, O Monstrum Horrendum! but because this will be a monster to the common people there shall be another version in good Dutch, with the variis Lectionibus, & giving in margin the various senses of the greek words, that every body may chuse for himself—this I presume is it—they are about, if it be not somewhat else, which I suspect because of his shifting Lodgings so oft.[9]

Perhaps the doctrines of the Family of Love survived to some extent among Mennonites and, as Henry More suggested, among the Quakers, who were in many ways similar.

More's criticism of the Quakers during the years preceding van Helmont's and Conway's conversion did have some effect on them, slowing down their progress into the Quaker fold. It was only during 1675, four years after van Helmont's arrival at Ragley, that Quakers became a familiar sight at the house. George Keith, William Penn, Robert Barclay, Isaac Penington,

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[7] The link between the Familists and the Quakers was often made. For example see Henry Halleywell, *An Account of the Familists as it is Revived & Propagated by the Quakers.*

[8] See *CL*, pp. 204, 208, 503-515.

[9] Furly to Locke, 17/27 February 1691. *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 206-7.

and even George Fox came to visit the sick Viscountess and her physician or sent their exhortations to be read in her darkened room. Even at this time neither van Helmont nor Conway had fully committed themselves to the Quakers. Letters still passed between them and Henry More in which the subject of Quakerism was openly and critically discussed. Two years later the situation had radically changed.

In 1677 it became public news that Anne Conway and van Helmont had declared themselves Quakers. The decisive factor that led to this deliberate act on their part was the Jewish Kabbalah and the decisive event, their meeting with the Quaker George Keith in 1675. Coming in place of William Penn, who was pleading in Parliament for the release of Quaker prisoners, George Keith came to Ragley as one of the leading Quaker apologists; he left, however, a Quaker with kabbalistic leanings, and he left behind two Kabbalists with Quaker leanings.

Van Helmont was an indefatigable thinker and a passionate talker, as Robert Barclay was later to remark. It was only natural that he would discuss his kabbalistic theories with his new acquaintance, George Keith. Keith was a Hebrew scholar in his own right and found that the Kabbalah agreed with and sustained his own thought to a remarkable degree. He immediately became interested in it and entered into correspondence with van Helmont's colleague Knorr von Rosenroth, who was then editing the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata.* In one letter to Knorr, Keith mentions Postel in a way which shows both familiarity and interest.[10] This may again suggest that the link between Familism and the Kabbalah in the sixteenth century anticipated the connection van Helmont, Keith, and Conway saw between the Kabbalah and Quakerism in the seventeenth.

Keith's trip to Ragley marked the beginning of a collaboration between himself, Conway, and van Helmont over the next four years. Keith strayed into the complex labyrinths of kabbalistic thought and away from Quaker orthodoxy. Conway became a Quaker-Kabbalist, leaving a posthumous book full of kabbalistic ideas. Van Helmont remained, as always, a Kabbalist first, but became a Quaker on the assumption that the two were compatible. Henry More was the bemused, exasperated, and, finally, deeply worried critic of these three collaborators. Both in the letters he sent from Cambridge and on the visits he made to Ragley, he repeatedly tried to dissuade his friends from entering too deeply into either Quakerism or the Kabbalah. He tried to make them see that both suffered from the same faults and excesses of enthusiasm and melancholy. Melancholy, warned More, affected the brain like wine, making a man embrace things he would otherwise reject: "a man in wine will kiss such persons as a sober man would scarce touch with a pair of tongs."[11] His colorful rhetoric was ineffectual.

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[10] Keith to von Rosenroth, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf 30.4, fols. 20ff.

[11] More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr. Henry More* (hereafter *Philosophical Writings*), p. 14. More tended to describe (and attack) every doctrine he disliked—the alchemy of Thomas Vaughan, the mechanical philosophy, radical sectarians such as

The profound effect Keith's first visit to Ragley had on Anne Conway and van Helmont is apparent from a letter Conway wrote to More just after Keith's departure in November, 1675. With obvious interest she describes the philosophical discussions she had had with Keith and van Helmont. She also tells More how glad she that several Quakers have visited him, obviously hoping that he has become better reconciled to the sect she is finding more and more attractive. This letter to More marks Anne Conway's first gentle, though sure, defense of the Quakers in the face of More's repeated criticisms. She denies that George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, ever agreed with the opinions of John Rice, one of the Ranters and an ex-Baptist, who caused a great scandal for the Quakers by denying the historical existence of Christ. She refuses to believe that the Quakers have any real root in Familism, "though perhaps some simple people amongst them may have expressed themselves in suspected terms out of ignorance."[12] But by far and away the most important part of her letter is the postscript: "Monsieur van Helmont," she writes, "is growne a very religious Churchman; hee goes every Sunday to the Quakers meetings."[13]

Certain aspects of Quakerism must have appealed to van Helmont from the first time he became aware of them. In the years before he came to Ragley, he had spent considerable time in Amsterdam and knew Adam Boreel and Abraham Galenus, Dutch Collegiants, or Mennonites, well. The Collegiants were a left-wing religious sect that had much in common with the Quakers, although the two groups often quarreled. Both rejected the organization and teachings of established Churches. They practiced their religion in meetings in which everyone was free to speak, and there was no division into clergy and congregation. Both groups stressed the importance of divine inspiration and valued illumination above book-learning; and both praised simple faith, simple manners, and straightforward speech. It is improbable, however, that van Helmont would have declared himself a Quaker on these grounds alone. Had it not been for his meeting with George Keith and Keith's assurance that the Kabbalah and Quakerism were compatible, van Helmont would probably have been content to rest on the fringes of Quakerism. He styled himself a "wandering eremite," who sought the truth and preferred to think of humanity as a whole, rather than in groups. Through Keith, however, he began to have strong reasons for believing that an alliance between Quakerism and the Kabbalah was entirely feasible and might provide the basis for the universal Christian Church he so much wanted to see in existence.

The common millenarian orientation and implicit perfectionism in much radical religious and philosophical thought in the seventeenth century helps

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the Familists and the Quakers—on the grounds that they were "enthusiasical." For a discussion of More's interpretation of "enthusiasm" as a psychological malady that in most cases arose from "carnality" and "lust," see Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Dr. Henry More: Religious Meaning and the Psychology of Delusion.*

[12] Conway to More, 29 November 1675, *CL*, pp. 407-408.

[13] ibid., p. 408.

to explain why van Helmont was attracted to the Quakers and why George Keith became such an enthusiastic Kabbalist. Quakers tended to internalize the Christian drama of Christ's death and resurrection and to think of heaven and hell as internal states. In this respect they thought in ways remarkably similar to mystical alchemists whose goal was an internal transmutation. G.F. Nuttall was the first to point out the similarities between the Quakers' belief in man's capacity to transcend sin and the Hermetic view of man as the divine microcosm.[14] The Quaker emphasis on the "inner light," or on "Christ within," led some Quakers to believe they were God or possessed miraculous powers. The shaking, or quaking, that earned Quakers their name, was a sign of divine possession. James Nayler identified so completely with this spirit of "Christ within" that he rode into Bristol on the back of a donkey, while Quaker women threw palm fronds in his path. Other Quakers claimed to possess the same miraculous healing powers as the Apostles and Christ. Several Quaker women maintained they experienced painless childbirth, a clear indication that in their minds they had returned to the prelapsarian time before God cursed Eve. A few Quakers attempted to resurrect the dead, apparently on the assumption that they, too, had returned to the prelapsarian world in which death was unknown. Ralph Josselin reports in his diary that a group of Quakers traveled to Colchester to see the resurrection of their fellow Quaker James Parnell.[15] In a case made notorious by Quaker critics, a Quaker woman from Worcester exhumed the body of a Quaker apprentice, who had drowned himself, and "commanded him in the name of the living God, to arise and walk."[16]

As Richard Bailey has demonstrated, no Quaker was more convinced of his own divinity that George Fox. Bailey argues that at the root of Fox's theology was the idea of "celestial adoption" or "celestial inhabitation," which meant that Christ literally dwelt within the sanctified individual so that he or she became "flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone."[17] Bailey calls this "Christopresent theology," and claims that only by understanding how radical this idea was can one possibly comprehend the antipathy and downright hatred so many people felt for the Quakers. Quakers literally believed they were divine. As sons and daughters of God they were the true nobility. Thus the world actually had turned upside down, and the Quakers' refusal to kowtow to their social superiors reflected their new status.[18] Fox describes the gnostic moment in which he was perfected and became in essence the first Adam:

> Now was I come up in the spirit through the Flaming Sword, into the Paradise of God. Al things were new; and all the creation gave unto me another smell

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[14] Nuttall, "Unity with the Creation: George Fox and the Hermetic Philosophy."

[15] *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616-1683*, p. 367.

[16] *George Fox's "Book of Miracles,"* pp. 14-15; Carroll, "Quaker Attitudes towards Signs and Wonders," pp. 74ff.; Reay, "Quakerism and Society."

[17] Bailey, *New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism: The Making and Unmaking of a God*, p. 19.

[18] ibid., p. 22.

> than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness; being renewed into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue.
>
> I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of things were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in the spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to Him in the power and light of Christ, should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell; in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made.[19]

One of Fox's favorite seals, inscribed "G.F. and the Flaming Sword," commemorated this return to prelapsarian perfection. As evidence of his divine status Fox kept a "Book of Miracles" listing the cures he had effected—some one hundred and fifty, among which were cases of toothache, ulcer, gout, blindness, scrofula, small-pox, the stone, paralysis, headaches, ulcers, and even a broken neck.[20]

Henry More was one of a number of people who recognized the radical nature of Fox's theology. As we have seen, he was convinced that the Quakers had descended from the Familists.[21] In his *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, he objected to the Quaker doctrine of "Christ within" because when taken literally, it meant that Quakers deserved divine adoration.[22] Bailey thinks More's criticisms of the Quakers played a role in their growing conservatism. Beginning in the 1670s with the writings of Barclay and Penn, Fox's radicalism was played down and attributed to a misunderstanding of his words by hostile critics. Fox's works and his journals were bowdlerized and his "Book of Miracles" suppressed in the interest of producing the respectable, humanitarian Quakerism we know today.[23] Later Quaker historians consequently lost sight of Fox's original message. In this sense More's analysis of the views of early Quakers was closer to the truth.

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[19] *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 97. Fox specifically distinguishes the Quakers from other Christian sects because of their belief in the potential perfectibility of mankind: "For of all the sects in Christendom (so called) that I discoursed with, I found none who could bear to be told that any should come to Adam's perfection—into that image of God, that righteousness and holiness, that Adam was in before he fell; to be clean and pure, without sin, as he was. Therefore how shall they be able to bear being told that any shall grow up to the measure of the stature of the fullness—of Christ, when they cannot bear to hear that any shall come, whilst upon earth, into the same power and Spirit that the prophets and apostles were in?—though it be a certain truth that none can understand their writings aright without the same Spirit by which they were written" (ibid., p. 101).

[20] *George Fox's "Book of Miracles."*

[21] *CL*, pp. 304-7, 342, 328, 379, 382, 408, 415, 417, 421.

[22] *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 14.

[23] For example, Thomas Ellwood, the first editor of Fox's journals was instructed to delete all references to Fox calling himself "Son of god." References to the Lancaster blasphemy trial, Fox's vision, described above, and James Nayler were also deleted. Bailey describes this cover-up in detail (p. 77 and passim).

The connection More saw between the Quakers and Familists is doubly interesting because it suggests the Familists as a possible source for the traces of Hermeticism discovered by Nuttall and others in Quakerism.[24] The Familist John Everard (1575-1650?), for example, has been seen by Christopher Hill, among others, as an exponent of ideas later associated with the Quakers.[25] Everard was also a Neoplatonist, an alchemist, and a Hermeticist. He did the first English translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and of the *Asclepius*, which was published after his death in 1657. His sermons are heavily influenced by Neoplatonic and Hermetic ideas. In his first sermon, Christ is identified as *Nous*, or Mind. Everard also translated the *Emerald Table* of Hermes Trismegistus and the alchemical works of Basil Valentine.[26] While recognizing the similarity between Hermeticism and Quakerism, Bailey sees Quakerism as far more radical. "Hermeticism. . . lacked the fiery apocalyptic of early Quakerism and this is a fundamental distinction."[27] Bailey makes a good point. Fox's vision was apocalyptic in a peculiarly Christian way, but whether it was more radical is debatable. Fox's vision relied entirely on Christ to come to the individual and do the work of his redemption. Van Helmont's Hermetic-kabbalistic-Neoplatonic view was qualitatively different; it allowed far more power and initiative to the individual. From the very beginning he or she was divine. All that had to happen was for individuals to "wake up" to this fact.

In his combination of interests, Everard is remarkably like van Helmont and Keith. As Henry More said, he was not at all surprised that Keith, the Quaker, should have latched onto the Kabbalah since, in his view, one enthusiasm invariably leads to another.[28] But we are in a position to see more clearly just why Keith could believe that the Kabbalah and Quakerism were compatible. As Quaker theology developed, however, and as the Quakers became increasingly conservative in their struggle to gain respectability, the notion of man's perfectibility was eliminated and with the disappearance of that idea went the link to kabbalistic, Hermetic, and alchemical thought. This is the subject of Chapter Eleven .

Keith found the Kabbalah irresistible. He discovered kabbalistic doctrines that confirmed theories he already held as a Quaker. The doctrine of the transmigration of souls, for example, provided an answer to the perennial problem of why there should be sin, misery, and death in the world and a way to make Quakerism more orthodox in the eyes of its detractors. He was elated by his introduction to Luria and considered the Kabbalah an ideal

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[24] Nuttall, "Unity With Creation: George Fox and the Hermetic Philosophy"; Cadbury, "Early Quakerism and Uncanonical Lore"; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 352; Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, p. 37.

[25] Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p. 149.

[26] Nuttall thinks Fox read Everard's translation of the *Divine Pymander*. On Everard see Schuler, "Spiritual Alchemies of Seventeenth-Century England"

[27] Bailey, *New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism*, p. 24, n. 2.

[28] *CL*, p. 415.

adjunct to his faith as a Quaker. His conviction and enthusiasm proved infectious.

During his visit to Ragley Keith became convinced that the Kabbalah offered clear support for both the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the distinctive Quaker concept of the "inner light," or "Christ within." Keith had elaborated on the idea of "Christ within" at length in the Quaker apologetics he wrote before his trip to Ragley. In one of his best known books, *Immediate Revelation* (1663), he argues that a "seed or birth of God" comes to dwell within an individual and that this alone gives the individual true knowledge of Christ and the Christian religion. This "seed" is a gift from God, a part of Christ's soul which extends throughout the universe and into individuals.[29] Keith was delighted to find that the Kabbalah supported his contention that Christ's soul was indeed extended throughout the universe. He accepted the parallel Knorr and van Helmont had drawn between God the Father and kabbalistic figure of *Arikh Anpin* and between Christ and *Zeir Anpin*. According to kabbalistic teaching the soul of *Zeir Anpin* was extended throughout the universe. Therefore, in Keith's view, it was possible to say precisely the same thing about Christ's soul. He presses this point in his first letter to Knorr:

> if the application of Sier [sic] Anpin to Christ holds, it will be of sufficient use for my point and will confirm my proposition. For I have wished that in Christ there is a certain most divine soul that is everywhere extended and that as it touches all human souls illuminates and vivifies them with its virtue, with the result that impious souls are turned back towards God and purged so that they may enjoy God by means of this most divine soul of Christ. For I know most certainly that no human soul (excepting alone that of the man Jesus Christ) is able to approach God immediately. For this reason it is necessary for us to approach God by a certain medium and by a ladder, by which medium we may enjoy God. The essence of God is exceedingly simple and, as far as his nature is concerned, remote from us. We cannot see and feel him without a medium. Moreover this medium is Christ, that celestial man, and for this reason that man Christ ought to reach our souls by the extension of his most divine soul in his divine body in us, although the external person of Christ, in which his most blessed soul resides as if centrally, is not in us but in the heavens about us.[30]

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[29] Keith, *Immediate Revelation,(or, Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God, Revealed in Man, Revealing the Knowledge of God, and the Things of his Kingdom Immediately)*. . . (hereafter *Immediate Revelation*), pp. 11-12.

[30] Keith to Knorr, January, 1676. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf. 30.4, fol. 20: ". . . si applicato. . . Seir Anpin ad Christum sustineat, sufficienter ad rem meam faciet, et propositio meo respondebit. Quod enim volebam hoc est, esse in Christo animam quandam divinissimam ubiquo extensam; quae omnes animas humanos attingens, sua virtute eas illuminet et vivificet, qua impiae animae ad Deum convertantur, converse purgentur, & purgate Deo fruantur, medio hujus animae Christi divinissimae. Novi enim quam certissime nullam animam hominis (solo homine Jesu Christo excepto) ad Deum immediate accedere posse. Quare medio quodam opus est nobis quo ut scala quadam asendamus in Deum, quo etiam mediante deo fruamur. Nuda enim Dei essentia nimis est quoad naturam suam a nobis remota, ut eam videre & sentire absque medio poterimus. Medium autem hoc est Christus ille homo coelestis, et ideo ille homo ad nos nimirum ad animas nostras pertinere debet, divinissimae suae animae in divino suo corpore in nobis extensione, etiamsi externa Christi persona, in qua beatissima ejus anima veluti centraliter residet, in nobis non sit, sed in coelis extra nos."

In a passage from this same letter Keith refers to "that seed of the divine in man" and explains what the Quakers mean when they claim that Christ is crucified in men. Quaker opponents focused on this last idea as exemplary evidence of Quaker heresy. They accused the Quakers of denying the historical reality of Christ's death and atonement in favor of an unorthodox and unjustified metaphorical interpretation. Keith rejects this criticism, claiming, on the contrary, that the Quaker doctrine of Christ within is "the great mystery and most outstanding secret" of "true" Christian religion:

> Indeed, I protest in this solemn oration that this is the great mystery and most outstanding secret in our religion, namely concerning the human form of Christ in us (Christ, who is the light, life, wisdom, food, and all things to us. Living in us, he teaches us, leads us, advises us in all things, strengthens us, and arms us against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and temptations of every sort, he, through whom—he inspires us at opportune times and places—we pray, beseech, and give thanks and also through whom we think all good thoughts). See, moreover, if this is not truly the greatest mystery of the Christian religion in as much as our religion is the true Christian religion. Nevertheless (oh, grief!), through many past centuries and even today it is completely unknown among the greatest number [of people], with the result that they have not obtained a reasonable notion of this great mystery. Nor do they have a good use and practice of the same, which nevertheless is itself of special importance.[31]

Keith was terribly excited by his discovery that the Kabbalah corroborated his way of thinking. In a letter to Henry More, Conway describes how "full" Keith is of his theory. At the same time she shows her own obvious interest in the Kabbalah as a way both to free Quakerism from the charge of Familism and to make the Scriptures more understandable:

> I am sure this new notion of G. Keiths about Christ seems farr removed from Familisme, he attributing by that more to the externall Person of our Saviour, then I think any ever hath done; he was speaking of it here, for it seemed very clear to him, and he was very full of it, but I have had more thought about it since he went upon the reading of his letter to you and that to Peganius [Knorr von Rosenroth]. . . I cannot but judge the opinion worth your serious consideration, and I hope, you will not think your time mispent in urging such solid reasons as you may give against it. . . . his opinion, if true, would facilitate the understanding of many places in Scripture.[32]

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[31] ibid., fol. 20v: "imò sane oratione solenni hoc protestor, hoc ipsum de Christo in nobis hominiforme (qui et lux et vita et sapientia et cibus et vestis et omnia sit. Animatus nostris, qui nos doceat, nos ducat, nobis consulat in omnibus, nos corroboret, et armet, contra Diabolum, mundum et Carnem, omnem ejusque generis tentationes, per quem (ut inspirat nos pro temporibus et locis opportunis) praedicamus, oramus, et gratias agimus, atque etiam per quem bonas omnes cogitationes meditamur) summum esses mysterium, paecipuumque arcanum in religione nostra. Vide autem si no sit etiam summum mysterium religionis vere Christiania, proindeque religionem nostram esse ipsam veram religionem Christianam, quae tamen (proh dolor!) per multa retro saecula atque hodie etiam peritus ignota est apud maximam partem, ut non ipsam sanam notionem magni hujus Mysterii assecuti sint nedum bonum usum et praxin ejusdem, quod ipsum tamen praecipuum est."

[32] Conway to More, 29 November 1674, *CL*, p. 408.

Keith was lured further and further into the Kabbalah's web. Finding that it agreed with his thinking on one point, he began to agree with it on others. Conway writes to More, telling him that Keith now accepts the Lurianic theory that an individual has more than one soul:

> G.K. [George Keith] in his letter to Peganius seemes to be of the Jewes opinion, that there may be many soules in man, and that our sensitive soul is really distinct from that endued with understanding, since his finding them to agree with him in his opinion, about the extension of the soul of Christ has been an occasion of his so readily adhering to them in this other opinion.[33]

In his reply, More tells Anne that he suspected Keith would become involved in the Kabbalah. Using an amusing analogy, he writes, "And that is come to passe which I suspected if he went to Ragley, that he would light on those notions of the Cabbalists. Which would be most sweet and pleasing to him as new milk to any Kittin."[34] More could not agree with Keith's theory about the extension of Christ's soul and dismisses it as a "haplesse and groundlesse conceit."[35] He suspected Keith's sudden interest in the Kabbalah as a Quaker ruse, fabricated to legitimize Quakerism in the eyes of the world by dissociating it from Familism. He clearly saw the parallel in Keith's mind between the Kabbalah and Quakerism but could see nothing good in supporting one bad philosophy with another:

> All this is to cover and palliate their view and erroneous Fantasticall expressions touching Christ within us which was used and insisted upon by the Familists in a pique and [mood?] of contempt, and indeed unbelief of Christ without us, and so one errour begetts another. . . . You see Madame whither G.K. is drawn to palliate that errour of which I convicted him here in my chamber and some that affect to be so infallibly inspired what they will not imagine, rather then conceit they are mistaken in their Inspiration.[36]

Here, as in his earlier criticisms of the Quakers, More continued to insist that they did not pay enough attention to the historical existence of Christ. He felt that a sincere and oft-voiced belief in Jesus as he appeared in the Scriptures was an essential aspect of the Christian religion. Those who did not believe in the outward Christ would tend to dismiss the Scriptures and rely on the dictates of an "inner light" or "inner Christ." More was fearfully skeptical of this so-called "inner light'." He has always at hand numerous examples of its unhappy consequences. Had not John Pennyman, the Quaker and associate of George Fox, burned all his Quaker books and threatened to burn the Bible if his spirit so directed.[37] And James Nayler, who was "at least equall with Fox," according to More, had he not proclaimed himself a prophet and even the Messiah?[38] For More the concept of "inner light" was the antithesis of

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[33] ibid.
[34] More to Conway, 29 December 1675, ibid., p. 415.
[35] ibid.
[36] *CL*, p. 415.
[37] ibid., pp. 303, 306.
[38] ibid., p. 417.

reason, it was an excuse for irrational activity and the cause of enthusiastic behavior. Reason must take the lead in religion as in other matters, "for take away Reason, and all Religions are alike true; as the Light being removed, all things are of one color."[39] More had ample reason for his suspicion that heresy was inherent in the Quaker doctrine of "Christ within." For implicit in this doctrine were notions of "perfectionism," or the gnostic idea of the "Godded-man." More's awareness of the dangers of this kind of thinking was a measure of its deep attraction for him, as I argue in the next chapter.

Time and again More accuses Keith and the Quakers of making too much of the "inner light" and too little of reason and the historical Christ. Keith felt compelled to still More's objections once and for all. In the second edition of his *Immediate Revelation* he appended a small tract entitled "An appendix containing an Answer to some new Objections and Questions upon some passages in the Book, Intituled, Immediate Revelation not ceas'd."[40] In this work, directed squarely against the objections More had sent him in writing, Keith repeatedly rejects More's contention that the Quakers deny the historical figure of Christ and says categorically that he most ardently believes in "that Christ that died at Jerusalem."[41] In taking this position, Keith reveals the extent to which his association with van Helmont and knowledge of the Lurianic Kabbalah had influenced his thought. He was able to agree unequivocally with Henry More that a Christian must believe in the birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because he had accepted Luria's doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

As we have seen, there were grave problems and seeming injustices in the Christian concept of faith and salvation. If men might only be saved through Christ and by believing in him, what was to happen to all the virtuous pagans who lived before Christ was born? How was one to harmonize the idea of God as merciful with the horrific notion that the sins of the fathers would be visited on their innocent children? How could God create man in love and then damn him to eternity? How could God's justice entail the idea of original sin, which tainted those living long after Adam's fall? Was there anything generous and good to be found in the plight of the maimed and deformed?

Luria's doctrine of the transmigration of souls solved these problems. By maintaining that all souls had been created at the same time and were contained in the figure of *Adam Kadmon* when he fell, Luria justified the concept of original sin and gave a plausible explanation for the belief that the children would suffer for their parents' misdeeds. Every soul had participated in Adam's sin and consequently must suffer for it.[42] Luria's belief

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[39] More, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 84.

[40] This edition appeared in 1675.

[41] More's phrase. Keith, *Immediate Revelation*, p. 225.

[42] This was Augustine's view as well: "The entire human race that was to pass through woman into offspring was contained in the first man when that married couple received the divine sentence condemning them to punishment, and humanity produced what humanity became, not what it was when created, but when, having sinned, it was punished" (Augustine,

that souls had twelve reincarnations, or twelve "revolutions," in which to perfect themselves and escape the cycle of birth and death laid the foundation for a belief in universal redemption. Christian Kabbalists took this to mean that Pagans would be born again and become a party to Christ's role in human salvation. The condition of the deaf, dumb, maimed and diseased was also explained as a consequence of their former lives, but their current state was transitory and bound to change for the better in future reincarnations.

Keith was truly concerned by the perplexities that Christianity as a religion in history imposes on its adherents. In his first edition of *Immediate Revelation* he had taken the position that the historical knowledge of Christ was not "essential." As he says there, some people may have been truly religious without ever having heard of Christ, while others who have heard of him may not:

> . . . that the Historical Knowledge and Faith is not an Essential part of true Religion, is manifest, because as some not having True Religion, may have that Historical Knowledge and Faith; so some who were truely Religious, did want it, as is clear in the case of that Devout and Religious Man, Cornelius, whose Prayers God heard, and yet he knew not the History of Christ, nor of his Death and Sufferings, till it was Preached unto him by Peter.[43]

The Quakers as a whole shared Keith's concern and were deeply worried by the problem of which was the more important, "historical" faith or "living" faith. In 1676, Adrian Paets, a Dutch Collegiant, who was ambassador of the States-General to Spain and later commissioner for the Dutch East India Company, wrote to the Quaker leader Robert Barclay about this problem. In his history of the Quakers, Sewel, summarizes the dilemma as Paets posed it:

> As to his Argument, as it was transmitted to us, if he considers the Strength and Substance of it, thus it stands: The History of the outward Coming, Nativity, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, is either necessary to Their Salvation, to whom the Scriptures came, or it is not necessary, viz. to be known and believed. If we say the Second, namely, that that History is not necessary to be known and believed in order to the Salvation of us Europeans who have the Scriptures, then it will follow that we are not Christians because we deny that True, Essential, and Constitutive Character of the Christian Religion, which consists in believing that Christ was sent into the World, Born of Mary, Dead and Buried, Rose again the Third Day, Ascended into Heaven. . . . But if he say the First, viz. that the Knowledge and Faith of the History are necessary to our Salvation, then it will follow, that the Scripture, and not the inward Revelation of the Holy Spirit, is the Principal Rule and Foundation of that History, Faith and Knowledge.[44]

Paets clearly saw the problem facing the Quakers with their emphasis on the "inward" Christ.

The City of God, 13:3). Augustine drew very different conclusions from this than Luria, however. For Augustine, man was irreparably fallen and no individual action could contribute to salvation. See Brown, *Augustine*; Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*.

[43] Keith, *Immediate Revelation*, p. 230.

[44] Sewel, *History of the Quakers*, p. 530.

In Keith and Barclay's answer to Paets, they make a distinction between "saving" faith and "historical" faith, the first was essential, the latter was helpful, but not absolutely necessary. "There are some Things," as Keith and Barclay say of historical knowledge, "tho not absolutely necessary, yet are very profitable, and conducive means to our Salvation."[45] Writing with the approval of the Quakers as a whole, Keith and Barclay reaffirm the Quakers' belief in the prime importance of the "inward" Christ; but at the same time they try to show that the Quakers did place a Christian emphasis on the Scriptures. It was a difficult distinction to make:

> We affirm, that tho' the Scriptures are ordinarily and commonly a certain Medium or Mean, by way of Material Object or Condition, for the producing of Historical Knowledge and Faith in us, and that, commonly speaking a necessary Mean too, as being that without which God doth not ordinarily reveal the outward History of God and Christ; yet we utterly deny that in True Christians, the Scripture or outward History in the Scriptures, is the Principle Motive, Foundation, or Principle Rule of that Historical Faith, much less of Saving Faith, to the producing of which, the Letter of the Scripture doth very frequently (as to many of its Acts, if not at all) not concur or co-operate, either as a material object, or as a necessary Condition, which is wont commonly to be called in the Schools, Causa sine qua non, or a Cause or Condition without which a thing cannot be done, tho' it doth not influence the Effect.[46]

Even though Keith had been instrumental in formulating this position with Barclay, it is obvious that he was glad to find the kabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation offered an escape from its ambiguities. The doctrine of transmigration resolved the issue in his mind and allowed him both to agree wholeheartedly with Henry More's insistence that a Christian must believe in the historical doctrines of Christianity and yet retain the Quaker emphasis on "saving" faith. A virtuous pagan could have "saving" faith without historical faith, but in time he would have both. Hence there was no conflict between the two. In his reply to More, Keith could defend the legitimacy of Quakerism as a Christian belief because of his acceptance of the kabbalistic doctrine of transmigration.

The Lurianic Kabbalah was not unique in postulating the doctrine of reincarnation. Keith could easily have found this idea expressed in many writings available and undoubtedly known to him. It derived from Plato[47] and found a haven in gnostic and Manichean thought,[48] appearing in Hermeticism[49] and Neoplatonism.[50] The earliest Jewish exposition of the idea of reincarnation occurs in the Book of *Bahir*, written about the second century CE.[51] This book was a favorite of later Kabbalists.

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[45] Sewel, *History of the Quakers*, p. 531.

[46] ibid., p. 532. This distinction parallels that made by some Catholic theologians between implicit and explicit faith in Christ. Cf. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*

[47] *Republic*, X, 614-621d; *Phaedo* 107-115a; *Phaedrus* 246a-257b; *Gorgias* 522e-537e. See Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, p. 168.

[48] Scholem, "Seelenwanderung," passim.

[49] Yates, *GBH T*, pp. 33-34.

[50] Iamblichus, *Theurgia, or the Egyptian Mysteries*, p. 175.

[51] Scholem, *MTJM*, p. 242.

The earliest and most thorough Christian proponent of reincarnation was Origen, and it was not until his views were officially rejected by the Catholic Church in the sixth century that the belief went underground in Christian circles and only reappeared in force some eleven centuries later, during van Helmont's lifetime. Origen had set the pattern for all subsequent Christian arguments in favor of reincarnation in the third book of his *De Principiis*. Here he exonerates God's justice and goodness by attributing sin, misery, and evil to an individual's free will and the choice he made in previous lives.[52] In stressing God's love and justice, Origen was forced to underplay and even deny the specifically Christian belief in an eternal hell and retributive justice. A loving God could not damn a sinner to hell-fire forever; punishment is curative, not vindictive, and helps a soul to improve in subsequent lives.[53] Origen's views found a few adherents in the following centuries, even after their official rejection by the Church. Scotus Erigena revived the doctrine of reincarnation in a slightly modified form during the ninth century, only to be in turn condemned.[54]

Up to the seventeenth century there were genuine moral scruples in the way of reviving Origen's belief in reincarnation. Such a belief brought into question the accepted Christian belief in retributive justice, eternal hell, and the redemption of the just alone. As D.P. Walker has said, all three concepts are related; if one is questioned, so are the others. People were literally afraid that by denying the eternity of hell and preaching universal salvation, they would plunge the world into moral anarchy. It is generally only in anonymous, posthumous, or chiliastic writings that one comes across a belief in universal salvation and a modification or elimination of the traditional view of hell.[55]

During the seventeenth century there was a change in attitude. With the anonymous publication of *A Letter of Resolution concerning Origen and the Chief of his Opinions* in 1661, the concept of an eternal hell and perpetual damnation was penetratingly criticized and Origen's belief in reincarnation found an able proponent. This book is believed on good evidence to have been written by George Rust, which makes it particularly interesting inasmuch as Rust was on the fringes of the Cambridge Platonists and a friend of Henry More.[56] Although More never realized the book was by Rust (if, indeed, it was), he later edited and annotated it along with another book in favor of pre-existence, *Lux Orientalis*, by another man on the fringes of

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[52] As Walker says, Origen exonerated God "by extending the scope of free will beyond all bounds" (*The Decline of Hell*, p. 12). For a detailed discussion of theories of pre-existence see Walker, *Hell*, passim.

[53] ibid., p. 13.

[54] Scotus Erigena held that the torments of Hell were essentially a bad conscience, but this was eternal. Walker, ibid., p. 4.

[55] ibid., pp. 6-7. Van Helmont was one of the few who, even in the seventeenth century, dared to state these views openly.

[56] ibid., pp. 125-126.

Cambridge Platonism, Joseph Glanvil.[57] More was thus a key figure in disseminating the idea of pre-existence and reincarnation long before he met van Helmont. In fact, van Helmont especially sought More out when he arrived in England in 1670 because he knew of More's commitment to the theory

Glanvil's book first appeared in 1662. Although in favor of the theory of pre-existence and reincarnation, Glanvil's treatment of Origen's hypothesis was much more cautious than Rust's. He is at pains to show that a belief in pre-existence offers no threat to the doctrines of the Anglican Church, but simply provides additional evidence for the overwhelming goodness of God:

> I say the Doctrine of Prae-existence thus stated, is nothing that I know of, an enemy to common theology: all things hence proceeding as in our ordinary systems; and only this difference, that this Hypothese clears the divine Attributes from any shadow of harshness or breach of equity, since it supposeth us to have sinned and deserved all the misery we suffer in the condition before we came hither: where as the other which teacheth that we became both guilty and miserable by the single and sole offence of Adam, when as we were not then in being, or as to our souls, as much as potentially in our great Progenitour; bears somewhat hardly upon the repute of the Divine Perfections.[58]

Like Rust and all the Cambridge Platonists in their stand against Calvinism, Glanvil insists that moral values must be universal and unchanging and that the divine will can in no way conflict with them. God must will what is good.[59]

In the course of *Lux Orientalis* Glanvil argues for the pre-existence of souls by systematically pointing out the difficulties inherent in other theories which account for their creation. God cannot create souls "immediately," for then they would be pure and incapable of sin. It would not be consonant with God's justice, love and wisdom to make pure souls suffer in impure bodies and then punish them for what was not their fault.[60] It would also be contrary to God's "Majesty" and "Purity" to "suppose him assistant to unlawful and unclean coitions."[61]

With immediate creation ruled out on these grounds, the only way to explain the creation of souls is by "traduction," or the creation of one soul by another. Glanvil rejects this hypothesis because in his view it entails either the unacceptable Hobbesian contention that the soul is material or the equally unacceptable idea that the soul is God-like and able to create something out of nothing.[62] Since neither immediate creation nor traduction can account for the creation of souls, Glanvil feels one is forced to conclude that they pre-existed and were created all at one time by God.

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[57] More, *Annotations upon the two foregoing Treatises, Lux Orientalis. . . and the Discourse of Truth. . .* (hereafter *Annotations*).

[58] Glanvil, *Lux Orientalis, or an Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages, Concerning the Praeexistence of Souls. . .* (hereafter *Lux Orientalis*), preface.

[59] Glanvil, *Lux Orientalis*, p. 56.

[60] ibid., pp. 5-7.

[61] ibid., pp. 10-11.

[62] ibid., pp. 16-18.

Glanvil's purpose in writing *Lux Orientalis* was to clear the divine attributes by explaining how God could create men and yet not be held responsible for human sin and suffering. Pre-existence did help to explain the inequalities of birth, rank, and fortune by attributing them to the actions of previous lives, but it was less successful in offering a solution to the problem or how sin originated in the first place. Glanvil paints a mythological picture of Adam falling from a state of grace because he followed his "debauched will" and allowed the "lower" powers of his souls to supplant the "higher, which became shrunk up, and consopted."[63] In the last resort, he attributes sin to man's free will and falls back on the weak argument of plenitude to show why God had to create men with the free will to sin: to be complete and full, creation must include a "peccable element."[64] But the harshness of the idea that God had endowed men with a free will that would almost inevitably lead them to sin was softened by the knowledge that individuals did have more than one chance to redeem themselves.

Glanvil does not accept the reasonable consequence of his belief in the pre-existence and reincarnation of souls and deny the eternity of hell, although at times he seems to want to do just this. As he says: "meer Philosophy" might conclude that individuals would eventually be free from the torments of hell. He adds, however: "But we know that Theology hath determined" and leaves the matter.[65] Glanvil takes immense care not to rock the Anglican boat.

The proponents of the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls had become so numerous in the years immediately before van Helmont's arrival in England that several English authors felt compelled to write against the doctrine. As E.W. says in the preface to his book *No Praeexistence* (1667):

> The Principal cause then, of my clashing thus openly with Praeexistence, was that (in my apprehension) it seemed Ecentrick unto verity, and I could never deem it any thing else but a figment and an Error; and I loved not to see, what I reputed a fable and Imposture, Travel so confidently through the World, and every where vaunt itself for a genuine Truth, and exact honour and respect, and challenge the credit and assent which is due alone to veracious Principles; but must needs be questioning the legitimacy thereof, and lifting up the skirts of its painted vail to shew it was a counterfeit.[66]

E.W. argues that free will and original sin suffice to explain the human predicament; men bring sin upon themselves. Like Samuel Parker, who had also written against pre-existence, E.W. makes the telling point that without any memory of former sins, what is the good of being punished in a subsequent life?[67]

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[63] Glanvil, *Lux Orientalis*, p. 118.

[64] ibid., p. 66.

[65] Glanvil, *Lux Orientalis*, pp. 135-136.

[66] E.W., *No Praeexistence. Or a Brief Dissertation Against the Hypothesis of Humane Souls, Living in a State Antecedent to this*, preface.

[67] Parker, *An Account of the Nature & Extent of the Divine Dominion of Goodness, Especially as they refer to the Origenian Hypothesis concerning the Pre-existence of Souls, Together with a special Account of the Vanity & Groundlessness of the Hypothesis it self.*

Keith had undoubtedly been aware of the debate between the proponents and the opponents of pre-existence before van Helmont's arrival in England. Van Helmont himself knew the English writings on the subject. In the letter Henry More wrote to Anne Conway, describing his first meeting with van Helmont at Cambridge, More says that van Helmont had asked him where he could get Glanvil's *Lux Orientalis*, along with all of More's English writings. More was particularly impressed by van Helmont's insistence that he would pay for them in "German gold."[68]

Glanvil's presentation of the case of pre-existence did not, however, represent the view van Helmont, Keith, and Conway came to take during the years of their friendship and collaboration. Glanvil offered the theory of pre-existence as a tentative hypothesis to support the view that God was just, good, and merciful, not willful and above morality. He insisted that the doctrine of pre-existence served no other purpose and repeatedly claims that it would have no effect on any other aspect of the Christian faith. On the other hand, Keith, van Helmont, and Conway took the doctrine of pre-existence as a central tenet in an animistic philosophy that postulated universal salvation. Their views had more in common with the Lurianic Kabbalah than orthodox Christianity.

The profound influence the Lurianic Kabbalah, and particularly Luria's doctrine of transmigration, had on van Helmont, Keith, and Conway during the four years of their collaboration becomes immediately apparent when one considers their writings over this period. The two most important books from the point of view of van Helmont's and Keith's later repudiation by the Quakers are the *Two Hundred Queries Moderately Propounded Concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls, and its Conformity to Christianity*, which was a collaborative effort, written at the instigation of Anne Conway, and van Helmont's *Cabbalistical Dialogue in Answer to the Opinion of a Learned Doctor in Philosophy and Theology*. But no less important for an understanding of the minds of the three collaborators at Ragley is Anne Conway's *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. All three books display a deep commitment to the Kabbalah and show how thoroughly van Helmont, Keith, and Conway had digested the concepts in the Lurianic treatise *Concerning the Revolutions of Souls*. When one considers that these books were written during the years van Helmont and Conway were becoming ever more closely involved with Quakers and while Keith was still a prominent and respected Quaker spokesman, one realizes that the three authors were convinced the Kabbalah and Quakerism were entirely compatible.

In the *Two Hundred Queries*, van Helmont, Keith, and Conway follow the traditional arguments made in favor of pre-existence and transmigration, but they are more elaborate and detailed in their exposition of exactly how transmigration occurs, and they extend the doctrine to its very limit, maintaining that eventually the whole of creation, including the very dirt of the

[68] More to Conway, 13 October 1670, *CL*, pp. 322-324.

earth, will be raised up and perfected. Their arguments in support of pre-existence are familiar enough. They justify their interest in the doctrine on the grounds that it has had a long history among both pagans and Jews as a way to clear God from any charge of injustice and harshness in dealing with his creatures. They feel that once pre-existence is accepted by Christians, it will open a way for the conversion of pagans and Jews:

> is it [the doctrine of transmigration] not like to prove of great service to the conversion both of Jews and Gentiles, to whom the denial of this one thing with some others, is of no small offence and stumbling-block to many, both Heathens and Jews, who conclude the Divinity of the modern Christians, cannot be good while their philosophy is so bad. Besides, many Doctrines maintained by some Christians, concerning Reprobation, Original Sin, Infinite Damnation and the like, do give great occasion to many, both Jews and Gentiles, to suspect the whole Doctrine is false, and many of them do bless themselves from the God of the Christians, as being not the true God, but an Idol of their own making, whom they have so shaped and framed after own dark and foolish Imaginations.[69]

The collaborators make the interesting point that the idea of original sin is not enough to explain why there is evil and sin in the world. If it were, then all men would be equally sinful, which is not the case; there must be an additional factor to explain the different degrees of goodness and badness in individuals, and this must be their behavior in previous lives:

> Does it at all remove the difficulty, to say, as some do, that those woful effects came upon Adam's Posterity for his sin? For besides that it seems unjust, and contrary to Scripture to continue so great a misery so long, upon so many thousands for his sin only, except they had been consenting to it, and that they could not be if they had no being; Besides this I say, do we not see this misery fall very unequally, some being born fools and mad men, others with a large capacity of Natural Understanding; Now how can this be only for Adam's sin, in the Judgment of these very men, seeing they say that all are equally guilty of it?[70]

They also employ the conventional argument that the claim of Christianity to be a universal religion can only rest on a belief in pre-existence. Otherwise the Scriptures could not say "He tasted death for every man."[71]

While their arguments in favor of pre-existence are conventional, their description of the mechanics of transmigration were novel and derived from the Lurianic Kabbalah. They accepted Luria's theory that each soul was born into the world twelve times and had twelve revolutions in which to perfect itself. The twelve revolutions added up to a total of a thousand years, but there were times between revolutions in which the soul was in a state of passive rest. The average lifetime was thus about 83 years, which seems high for the seventeenth century, although the authors accept this as entirely possible:

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[69] *Two Hundred Queries*, p. 163ff.
[70] ibid., pp. 131-132.
[71] ibid., p. 25.

> But seeing the Age of Men in this world, is not always equal, some dying at sixty; some at fifty; some at twenty, and sooner, if in twelve times living in the world, a man has lived a thousand years, though as some times fewer years than at other times; comes it not to one at last?[72]

The three collaborators vigorously deny the eternity of hell. They refuse to accept the distinction often made during the century between an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine of hell. They deemed it ridiculous to suggest that common people should purposely be misled in order to deter them from sin. Should human beings presume to lie for God, they ask incredulously?

> Is it a sufficient ground for preaching this Doctrine, to conceit that it will terrify and affright people from sin? Does God need any Lye of Man's making, to deter people from sin? Or shall we lye for God?[73]

The very idea that hell is eternal is what turns people into atheists, for it makes God seem harsh and unnaturally cruel: "remove but this" (meaning the doctrine of an eternal hell) "and what hath the Atheist on that score to quarrel with that Ever-glorious Being about?"[74]

Following Origen, Rust, and Glanvil, they base their arguments against the eternity of hell on the divine attributes. This, in fact, is the starting point for van Helmont's entire philosophy, as it is for Conway's as well.[75] Because God is unchangeable, he cannot come to hate creatures he once loved; having created them in love, he must punish them in love, not vindictively but with an eye to their improvement:

> If God be unchangeable, as certainly he is, can he absolutely hate any of his Creatures, which once he loved? And if when he most severely punishes his creatures, he loveth them, is not then his punishing them an Act of Love, and consequently medicinal, or in order to their recovery?[76]

The attribute of divine justice also militates against the eternity of hell. Justice requires that the punishment fit the crime, and there is nothing proportionate between a temporal and finite sin and an infinite and eternal punishment. In making this point, van Helmont, Keith, and Conway employ the same argument that Aboab had made in Amsterdam forty years before and undermine the belief that any sin against God is worthy of eternal punishment by a *reductio ab absurdam*:[77]

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[72] *Two Hundred Queries*, p. 53.

[73] ibid., pp. 122.

[74] ibid., p. 20.

[75] In the preface to *The Divine Being and its Attributes*, Paulus Buchius waxes eloquent about all he has learned from van Helmont, the most important lesson being that theology and philosophy are one and that true knowledge stems from the correct understanding of the divine attributes. In *A Letter to a Gentleman, Touching the Treatise Entitled, Two Hundred Queries Concerning the doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls. . .*, the author (probably Benjamin Furly) also claims that van Helmont "discovered" his philosophy "by putting himself to the pains of thinking out this System to the clearing of the Divine Attributes of God's Justice, Mercy, and Wisdom. . . ." (p. 53). Conway begins her book with five sections that "concern God and his divine attributes" (p. 9).

[76] *Two Hundred Queries*, p. 115.

[77] See ch. 6.

> What proportion of justice is there, between a finite or temporal sinning, and an infinite and eternal punishment? . . . If it be said there is a proportion of strict justice, because the sin is against an infinite Object or Being, and therefore it deserves an infinite punishment, which is the most plausible reason that is ordinarily brought, or indeed can be brought to palliate so great an Absurdity: may it not be answered, that this presence, when narrowly examined, will be found to be weak and impertinent? For if the proportion of Justice lay there, because that sin is against an infinite being, then not the least sin committed, and persisted in (being as well as the greatest, committed against the same Infinite Being) is to be punished (by that rule) not only infinitely, but in as infinite severity both for quantity and quality of pain, as the greatest of torments, because it is against the greatest of objects? But is not this false and expressly contrary to Scripture which teaches degrees of punishments according to the degrees of the sins committed?[78]

When the authors discuss the means by which individuals can achieve salvation, they appear entirely conventional and orthodox. For example, Queries 40-42 emphasize that there can be no salvation without a belief in Jesus Christ and without the efficacy of his death and resurrection for our atonement;

> Qu. 40. What is Faith in Christ Jesus, is it a believing in him only as he is a Spirit, Light or Life in our Heart? Or only as he did outwardly *come in the Flesh for our justification*? Or is it not rather, a believing in him and a receiving of him in both Respects, not dividing Christ, but receiving him wholly, both as he came outwardly, with all the Blessings and Benefits accruing thereby, and as he came, and daily cometh inwardly as a Light, Life, and quickening Spirit into our Hearts?
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> Qu. 41. Seeing the Scripture expressly saith, That God hath set forth the Lord Jesus *to be a propitiation thorough Faith in his blood*, Rom. 3. 25. are we not as well to believe in the Blood of Christ as in his Light? And as well in his Light, as in his Blood, as Christ hath expressly taught? And this Blood, is it not that very blood which was shed upon the Cross? And can any ever obtain Eternal Salvation, but by Faith in that blood? And can any have Faith in it, to whom it was never revealed, not preached?
>
> Qu 42. Doth not the Scripture seem to make it absolutely necessary to the Salvation of all Men, to confess with their Mouths, and believe with their hearts that God hath raised him from the dead, Rom 10. 9? And did not the Apostles preach this, as a great and main Article of Faith, That *Christ died for the sins of the World*, and That Remission of their Sins was by his blood as they came to believe in him, that gave it for them?[79]

These statements emphasizing the essential role belief in Christ plays in salvation are entirely orthodox. Elsewhere, however, the authors claim that individuals who had faith in the generations before the birth of Christ were also saved. This they called the "first grace": "Is it not one and the same Faith by which Believers were saved before the Death of Christ, with that, by which they are now saved, since his Death, and shall be saved unto the

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[78] *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 125-126. See *A Letter of Resolution Concerning Origen*, pp. 75-76.

[79] *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 35ff.

worlds end?"[80] Still, the general thrust of this work is to emphasis Christ's role in salvation and to justify the doctrine of transmigration because it gives everyone the certainty of receiving the grace that belief entailed.

The foundation for a far more radical and more overtly kabbalistic affirmation of universal salvation appears in van Helmont's *A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, a small treatise included in the *Kabbala denudata*. Van Helmont wrote this as an answer to Henry More's criticism of the Kabbalah as a pantheistic and materialistic philosophy. It was translated into English and published separately in 1682.[81] The *Cabbalistical Dialogue* contains many ideas that also appear in Conway's treatise, and it is written in a similar straight-forward style without the extravagant symbolism and mythology characteristic of the Lurianic Kabbalah. The Kabbalah is presented in a philosophical and decidedly Neoplatonic key, and in this respect followed in the footsteps of Abraham Cohen Herrera's treatise, *Porta coelorum*, which was featured in the *Kabbala denudata*.[82] The Cabbalistic Dialogue offers a succinct statement of van Helmont's monistic, kabbalistic philosophy. It provides a penetrating criticism of the concept of creation *ex nihilo* as so totally against the wisdom and goodness of God that it makes God responsible for "death, sin, darkness, monsters, evil, etc."[83] Henry More strongly supported the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In his critique of the Kabbalah he had argued that the denial of this doctrine inevitably led to pantheism. In van Helmont's response he takes great pains to argue that an emanationist theory of creation does not imply pantheism. He argues, just as Conway was to do in her treatise, that God could not create anything completely contrary to himself; therefore he could not have created matter in the first instance but must have created something of a "spiritual nature." What is commonly called "matter" is simply the state this "spiritual nature" assumed when it became more gross.[84] Matter is not something which exists in its own right; it is a temporary state of privation:

> Matter, as such, is not a spirit; but only that very substance itself, which appeareth under the form of matter, viz. in its blindness or darkness, to wit, in its dull rest, and privation of its former happiness, that was in sometimes past a spirit, and as yet is fundamentally and radically such, and will sometime hereafter be such again formally.[85]

At this point the Kabbalist catechumen, who is, of course, Henry More, interrupts, objecting:

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[80] *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 17-18. Cf. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*

[81] Although this book has no author on the title page it has been attributed to van Helmont and was published originally in the *KD*, I, 2: 308-312 and clearly reflects his way of thinking. See *Collectanea Chymica*, 1684, after page 154, list of "Books sold by William Cooper," in which the title is given as "Fr. Merc. van Helmont, his Cabbalistic Dialogue concerning the world's creation, in answer to Dr. Henry More, 1682."

[82] *KD*, II, 3: 188-242.

[83] *KD*, I, 2: 311.

[84] Van Helmont, *Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 4: *KD* I, 2: 319.

[85] ibid., pp. 8-9; *KD* I, 2: 311.

> But in this way spiritual natures will hardly differ from the creator himself. Since it might be supposed that torpid matter comes from these [spiritual natures], it would follow that the divine essence is also a corporeal spirit.[86]

Van Helmont agrees that while some people have taken it this way, he most certainly does not; he in no way confuses the creator with his creation. As he says, "To coincide generically is not to coincide essentially," an argument that Conway makes in her treatise as well. Van Helmont offers analogies to prove his point: a ray of sun is not the sun and an idea is not the mind that thinks it. He uses another analogy that appears in Conway's treatise, that of a fountain from which pebbles precipitate. Hence the particles out of which the material world is made, cannot be said to be of the divine essence, but of that "nature which has been produced, constituted, created, and set apart by the divine essence."[87] Although creatures can approach increasingly closer to God, "unity is impossible."[88]

Admittedly, all emanationist theories, including this one, run into the problem of separating Creator from creature.[89] But van Helmont does try to answer More's criticisms.[90] He does this in another treatise as well, the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*. Here he draws a parallel between Christ and *Adam Kadmon*. According to the Lurianic Kabbalah, *Adam Kadmon* is the primordial man, the first being emanated from the divine light. He contains the souls of all subsequent men within himself, and consequently acts as both a mediator between God and the creatures and as their creator. Thus Christ, inasmuch as he is identified with *Adam Kadmon*, separates the Creator from the creatures, and the charge of pantheism is consequently inapplicable. The same defense, namely that Christ acts as a middle nature or buffer between God and the creatures, appears in the *Seder Olam* as well in the *Paradoxal Discourses*.[91] It should be pointed out that in none of these works is anything said about the necessity of Christ's death, resurrection, and atonement as prerequisites to salvation.

Conway's *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* recapitulates ideas presented in the works previously discussed. It is difficult to know exactly when it was written. Since the Quakers are not mentioned, Marjorie Nicolson concluded that it was finished before Conway met Keith and became involved with the Quakers. But this conclusion ignores the fact that what drew Keith to the Kabbalah in the first place was the philosophical and theological foundation it provided for Quaker concepts. Thus Conway's book could have been written at any time during her collaboration with Keith

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[86] *KD*, I, 2: 310.

[87] ibid.

[88] *KD* I, 2: 312: "unity [with God] is impossible."

[89] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 145. Medieval Platonists claimed that the power, and not the substance, of God goes forth.

[90] Hutton argues that the *Cabbalistical Dialogue* does not answer More's criticisms of the Kabbalah, while Conway's treatise does ("Henry More, Anne Conway and the Kabbalah: a Cure for the Kabbalist Nightmare?"). I think both treatises attempt to answer More and they do so in a similar way.

[91] *Seder Olam*, pp. 6ff; *Paradoxal Discourses*, pp. 106-7.

and van Helmont and even after her conversion. The preface, written by More and van Helmont, specifically says the book was written "towards the later end of her long and tedious Pains and Sickness" and that "She never had Opportunity to revise, correct, or perfect" her work.[92] Although these statements attribute the work solely to Conway, it reflects the opinions of van Helmont.

Anne Conway's book was published at van Helmont's instigation long after her death.[93] He thought highly of it, recommending it to Leibniz, whose copy still exists in the Leibniz archives in Hanover.[94] It is carefully argued, scholastic in presentation and shows the imprint of kabbalistic thought at every turn. Her intention was to maneuver between the Scylla of Spinoza's pantheism and the Charybdis of Hobbesian materialism, while rejecting Cartesian dualism and arguing for the truth, justice and goodness of the Christian religion and the Christian God. On the basis of the divine attributes, she follows van Helmont and argues that God could not create anything completely contrary to himself. As she says, echoing passages in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*: "how can any creature receive so vile and diminished an essence from him (who is so infinitely generous and good) that it does not share any life or perception and is not able to aspire to the least degree of these for all eternity?"[95] A creature can progress towards the Good without limit because God is infinite and infinitely good; it cannot, however, progress towards evil without limit because nothing exists, or could exist, which is totally opposite to God and infinitely and unchangeable evil:

> Thus, a body is always able to become more and more spiritual to infinity since God, who is the first and highest spirit, is infinite and does not and cannot partake of the least corporeality. Consequently, it is the nature of a creature, unless it degenerates, always to become more and more like the creator. But because there is no being which is in every way contrary to God (surely nothing exists which is infinitely and immutably bad, as God is infinitely and immutably good, and there is nothing which is infinitely dark as God is infinitely light, nor is anything infinitely a body having no spirit, as God is infinitely spirit having no body), it is therefore clear that no creature can become

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[92] Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, preface by More, p. 3.

[93] Conway's book was translated by J.C., presumably the John Clarke who translated van Helmont's *Seder Olam* and published it in English in 1693. In his preface to the reader, J.C. expressly says that he decided to translate Conway's book on van Helmont's prompting and that van Helmont had had it published previously in Latin and Dutch.

[94] Leibniz refers favorably to Conway's book: "My philosophical views approach somewhat closely those of the late Countess Conway, and hold a middle position between Plato and Democritus, because I hold that all things take place mechanically as Democritus and Descartes contend against the views of Henry More and his followers, and hold too, nevertheless, that everything takes place according to a living principle and according to final causes— all things are full of life and consciousness, contrary to the views of the atomists" (G III: 217). Merchant suggests Conway as a possible influence on Leibniz. I believe the stronger influence was van Helmont, as I argue in ch. 13.

[95] Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (hereafter *Principles*), p. 45.

> more and more a body to infinity, although it can become more and more a spirit to infinity. And nothing can become darker and darker to infinity, although it can become brighter and brighter to infinity. For this reason, nothing can be bad to infinity, although it can become better and better to infinity. [96]

Although there is an affinity between God and his creatures, Conway's treatise, like *The Cabbalistic Dialogue*, counters More's attack on the Kabbalah as pantheistic by postulating an absolute separation between God and his creatures with Christ as the mediating link. There are thus three distinct species of being in Conway's universe (God, Christ, and the creatures). In her scheme, creatures can and will become better and better but they can never become Christ, just as Christ can never become God, a point made, as we have seen, in the *Cabbalistical Dialogue*:[97]

> . . . we deny the conclusion, namely that God and creatures are one substance. For there are transmutations of all creatures from one species to another, as from stone to earth, from earth to grass, from grass to sheep, from sheep to human flesh, from human flesh to the lowest spirits of man and from these to the noblest spirits; but this progression and ascension cannot reach God, who is the supreme Being and whose nature infinitely surpasses every creature, even one brought to the highest level. For the nature of god is immutable in every way and does not admit the slightest shadow of change. But it is the nature of a creature to be mutable.[98]

Conway's Christology, like van Helmont's, is also highly unorthodox, for it combines kabbalistic and Neoplatonic ideas with the *logos* doctrine of Philo.

> The ancient Kabbalists have written many things about this, namely, how the son of God was created; how his existence in the order of nature preceded all creatures; how everything is blessed and receives holiness in him and through him, whom they call in their writings the celestial Adam, or the first man, Adam Kadmon, the great priest, the husband or betrothed of the church, or as Phil Judaeus called him, the first-born son of God.[99]

The identification of Christ with *Adam Kadmon* and the notion that he acts as a mediator, or the middle species between God and the creatures, owes a great deal to Abraham Cohen *Hererra's Porta coelorum*, which appears in the first volume of the *Kabbala denudata*. Citing numerous authorities (Maimonides and Plotinus among them), Hererra maintains that this middle nature came into existence through emanation.[100] Conway applies this idea to Christ: ". . . the son of man is said to have been generated by God rather than

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[96] *Principles*, p. 42.

[97] *KD* I, 2: 312: "unity [with God] is impossible."

[98] *Principles*, p. 65.

[99] ibid., p. 23. It would be interesting to know how much and what Conway read of Philo. On the relationship between Arianism and Neoplatonism, see Sarah Hutton, "The Neoplatonic Roots of Arianism: Ralph Cudworth and Theophilius Gale." Patrides also points out how Platonic and Plotinian trinities frequently led to heresy because of the tendency to subordinate the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father (*Cambridge Platonists*, p. 33, n.1).

[100] "Confirmatur autoritatibus Philosophorum sapientissimorum, quod à Causa prima immediatè procedat Principium perfectum Unam tantùm; & mediante ipso, tanquam instru-mento in manu figuli, facta sint omnia reliqua Causata" (*KD*, I, 3: 39).

made or created."[101] Christ is therefore neither co-equal nor co-eternal with the Father, a view that has more in common with the Kabbalah and Neoplatonism than Christianity. Conway goes a step further and rejects the entire concept of the Trinity as both unreasonable and unscriptural, and, more importantly, as an obstacle to the conversion of Jews and Turks: ". . . the phrase concerning the three distinct persons. . . is a stumbling block and offense to Jews, Turks, and other people, has truly no reasonable sense in itself, and is found nowhere in Scripture."[102] She proposes an alternative way to view the Trinity that is indebted to the kabbalistic ideas about thought, language, and divine creation discussed in van Helmont's *Alphabet of Nature*:

> . . . wisdom and will in God are not entities or substances distinct from him but, in fact, distinct modes or properties of one and the same substance. And this is that very thing which those who are the most knowledgeable and judicious among Christians understand by the Trinity. . . . For they hardly deny that God is wisdom, an essential idea, and such a word in himself by which he knows all things. And when they concede that the same being gives essence to all things, they are forced by necessity to acknowledge that the will exists in him through which he maintains and brings into actual being that which was hidden in the idea, so that he produces and makes a distinct and essential substance. And this is surely to create the essence of a creature, for the idea alone does not confer being on a creature, but only will conjoined with the idea, just as an architect may have an idea of a house in mind, yet the idea alone does not build the house, but will is joined with it and cooperates with it.[103]

Here we have a Trinity composed variously of wisdom, idea, and word or wisdom, idea, and will, which accords better with Neoplatonism and the Kabbalah than Christianity.

Conway rephrases van Helmont's argument that matter is simply a term to describe spirit in a "dull" or "gross" state. Within the "species" of creatures there is a continuum between spirit and matter:

> Truly, every body is a spirit and nothing else, and it differs from a spirit only insofar as it is darker. Therefore the crasser it becomes, the more it is removed from the condition of spirit. Consequently, the distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial.[104]

Body and spirit must have the same origin because both share the same characteristic of density. Certain spirits must be dense because they are retained in the body during life and only escape once the body has dissolved in death. There are different degrees of spirits with each body; the "grosser" were fixed spirits (these were something like the animal and vegetable spirits) and they produced the more "subtle," tenuous spirits, and these, in turn, were able to escape from the creature as colors, odorous, sounds, etc.[105]

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[101] *Principles*, p. 25.

[102] ibid., p. 10.

[103] ibid., p. 10. These statements are supported by kabbalistic notations (probably added by van Helmont) taken from van Helmont's *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, which is further evidence of the similarity between the views of Conway and van Helmont.

[104] *Principles*, pp. 39-40.

[105] ibid., p. 61.

In making this point, Conway accepts van Helmont's view that spirits continually pass into and out of individuals, joining them to their fellow creatures through a complex network of sympathetic emanations. The infinite gradations of spirits are the cause of all sympathy and antipathy and account for those qualities which, because they are not properly understood, are mistakenly called "occult":

> all creatures from the highest to the lowest are inseparably united one to another by their subtler mediating parts, which come between them and which are emanations from one creature to another, through which they can act upon one another at the greatest distance. This is the basis of all the sympathy and antipathy which occurs in creatures, and if these things are well understood by someone, he may easily see into the most secret and hidden causes of most things, which ignorant men call occult qualities.[106]

Conway's major point throughout her treatise is that mind and body, or spirit and matter, simply are not and cannot be two entirely different and separate entities. If they were, they could never interact as they clearly do. She offers many different arguments to support this basic contention, some more successful than others. But one argument deserves special mention because it shows how perceptive Conway was as well as how useful biography can be in interpreting the work of any philosopher.[107] For obvious reasons having to do with her own deplorable physical condition, Conway brings up the issue of pain. If mind and body were utterly separate, why, she asks, should the soul or spirit suffer so grievously from bodily pain? Why would the mind or spirit not simply cut off all contact with the body?

> Furthermore, why does the spirit or soul suffer so with bodily pain? For if when united to the body it has no corporeality or bodily nature, why is it wounded or grieved when the body is wounded, whose nature is so different? For since the soul can so easily penetrate the body, how can any corporeal thing hurt it? If one says that only the body feels pain but not the soul, this contradicts the principle of those who affirm that the body has no life or perception. But if one admits that the soul is of one nature and substance with the body, although it surpasses the body by many degrees of life and spirituality, just as it does in swiftness and penetrability and various other perfections, then all the above mentioned difficulties vanish; and one may easily understand how the soul and body are united together and how the soul moves the body and suffers with it and through it.[108]

Conway had enlisted More's help in studying Descartes. As an apt and enthusiastic pupil, she may have discovered something that More overlooked; for in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* Descartes points out that the one area where mind-body dualism does not seem to hold is pain:

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[106] *Principles*, p. 20.

[107] This last point is a contentious one. Many modern literary critics deny that biography has any place in the interpretation of literature or that the author's intended meaning is important or even possible to determine. Obviously, historians would be out of work if they accepted this line of reasoning, but then so would literary critics

[108] *Principles*, p. 58.

> Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken. Similarly, when the body needed food or drink, I should have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain and so on are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body.[109]

In objecting to Cartesian dualism on the grounds that bodily pain clearly affects the mind, Anne echoed an objection made by the Palatine Princess Elizabeth, who corresponded with Descartes. Like Conway, Elizabeth belonged to the rare breed of highly intellectual women so unusual during the period. In one of her letters to Descartes she posed the same question Anne Conway was later to raise: if the mind is utterly unlike the body, why is it so troubled and worried by physical feelings, sensations, and emotions? Descartes never answered the question. He simply advised Elizabeth to spend only a few days a year on metaphysical matters, a clear put-down and something he certainly never suggested to any of his male correspondents.[110]

On the basis of her conviction that nothing can become totally evil, dark, and material, Anne Conway denies the eternity of hell and argues that punishments are "medicinal" and last for only as long as it takes to "cure" the soul of its sin and redirect it towards the path of righteousness:

> Just as all the punishments inflicted by God on his creatures are in proportion to their sins, so they tend, even the worst, to their good and to their restoration and they are so medicinal as to cure these sickly creatures and restore them to a better condition than they previously enjoyed[111]

She accepted this idea in a very personal way. By seeing pain as the inevitable prelude to redemption, she found a justification and consolation for her own suffering.

There could be no greater symbol of the value of pain and suffering than the figure of Christ crucified and resurrected. Mystically-minded alchemists incorporated this idea into their art, making it an axiom that the physical suffering, even death, of compounds will lead to their purification and ennoblement. With his alchemical background, Christian upbringing, and study of the Lurianic Kabbalah, van Helmont came to accept pain as a necessary, but transitory, element in a scheme of universal redemption. In convincing Anne Conway of this truth, he gave her help as a philosopher where he could not give it as her physician. As she says:

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[109] *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, II: 56.

[110] Johnstone, "The Bodily Nature of the Self or what Descartes should have conceded Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia."

[111] *Principles*, p. 38.

> And because it is not possible to proceed towards evil to infinity since there is no example of infinite evil, every creature must necessarily turn again towards good or fall into eternal silence, which is contrary to nature. But if anyone should say that it falls into eternal torment, I answer: if you understand by eternity an infinity of ages which will never end, this is impossible because all pain and torment stimulates the life or spirit existing in everything which suffers. As we see from constant experience and as reason teaches us, this must necessarily happen because through pain and suffering whatever grossness or crassness is contracted by the spirit or body is diminished; and so the spirit imprisoned in such grossness or crassness is set free and becomes more spiritual and, consequently, more active and effective through pain.
>
> Thus, since a creature cannot proceed infinitely toward evil nor fall into inactivity or silence or utter eternal suffering, it irrefutably follows that it must return toward the good, and the greater its suffering, the sooner its return and restoration.[112]

In this passage, salvation is the result of an individual's positive response to suffering, not an axiomatic consequence of a belief in Christ and Christ's atonement for man's sins. As a good Kabbalist, Conway has a far more positive view of human nature than most Christians, especially Lutherans and Calvinists. Man is not irremediably fallen and totally reliant on Christ for salvation. On the contrary, divine justice has inscribed a law for all creatures, which, if followed, ensures salvation: "The same justice imposes a law for all creatures and inscribes it in their very natures. Whatever creature breaks this law is punished accordingly. But any creature who observes this law receives the reward of becoming better."[113] In fact, it is the essence of nature to ensure that everything becomes increasingly perfect: "For nature always works toward the greater perfection of subtlety and spirituality."[114]

This is not to say that Conway ignores Christ's suffering and his role in man's redemption. She refers to both, as in the following passage:

> The purpose of all his suffering, up to his death and burial, was to heal, preserve, and restore creatures from corruption and death, which came upon them through the Fall, and so thereby put an end, at last, to time and raise creatures beyond time to himself. . . .[115]

But I would argue that these references fit uncomfortably within the overall scheme of a kabbalistic work that presents an optimistic philosophy of universal salvation predicated on an individual's own actions. This is the gist of the following passage, which specifically says that creatures attain ever-greater perfection "in their natural course and order" and "through their own efforts." Here, as in several of the passages quoted above, there is no reference to Christ whatsoever:

> But this wisdom of God sees that it is more fitting for all things to proceed in their natural course and order, so that in this way they may achieve that maturity which he bestows one each and every being and so that creature may

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[112] *Principles*, pp. 42-3.
[113] ibid., p. 35.
[114] ibid., p. 61.
[115] ibid., p. 27.

> have the opportunity to attain, through their own efforts, ever greater perfection as instruments of divine wisdom, goodness, and power, which operate in them and with them. For in this the creatures enjoy greater pleasure since they possess what they have as the fruits of their labor.[116]

Furthermore, the few times that Conway does refer to Christ's suffering and death, she leans more towards the Quakers' metaphorical understanding of both as occurring with the individual:

> Similarly, through his spiritual and inward appearance in men he saves, preserves, and restores their souls, and, as it were, subjects himself to suffering and death, and for a certain period he submits himself to the laws of time so that he may raise the souls of men above time and corruption up to himself, in whom they receive blessing and in whom they grow by degrees in goodness, virtue, and holiness forever.[117]

The idea that souls return to Christ and are literally incorporated in him makes perfect kabbalistic sense when applied to *Adam Kadmon*, who originally did contain all souls, but less sense in purely Christian terms. In fact, one could argue that the Christ presented in Anne Conway's *Principles* has very little to do with the flesh and blood figure of Jesus in the Gospels and much more to do with the Kabbalah and Neoplatonism. Conway's Christ is a principle and an abstraction, and it is this very fact that encourages her to consider her kabbalistic philosophy truly ecumenical. For in her view the simple acknowledgement that a mediator exists between God and the Creatures is sufficient to make one a Christian. One does not have to accept or even know the Gospels:

> Therefore, those who acknowledge such a mediator and believe in him can be said truly to believe in Jesus Christ, even though they do not yet know it and are not convinced that he has already come in the flesh.[118]

The three books written during the four years of van Helmont's, Keith's, and Anne Conway's collaboration at Ragley reveal the powerful influence the Lurianic Kabbalah had on their thought. Their vision of a universal Christian Church dedicated to the principle of love cannot help but seem attractive. Their error lay in thinking they had found the embodiment of this vision in the Quakers. The gradual development of their conviction that the Kabbalah and Quakerism were complementary can be followed in the letters Conway wrote to Henry More. More's replies reveal his growing concern about the developments at Ragley. In one letter he combines a plea against sectarianism with suggestions as to the most suitable dining arrangements for Quakers visiting Ragley—a mixture of lofty principles and minute details that highlights his anxiety:

> Mr. Van Helmont though he goes so diligently to the quakers meetings I hope will retain his liberty still and be of the election sect, taking what is Good but leaving out any thing that will lessen him or make him seem worse. And I have

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[116] *Principles*, p. 66.
[117] ibid., p. 27.
[118] ibid., p. 32.

> thought of it now of late, that when any man Quaker dines at Ragley, it were better, and it may be more easy to them, to come in after grace is sayd, and so after dinner to go out before it is sayd. I think this would be farr more decorous, and I believe as acceptable to them. Madame you will pardon my curiosity that I minde such thinges at this distance. But I seek nothing in it but the good of all.[119]

In the postscript to his letter More adds a note of gossip he has heard which must have been a severe shock to him: "Since my writing of this, I heare there are Quaker meetings at Ragley with Monsieur van Helmont, but I sayd I thought it was a mistake, and that it was occasion'd from Monsieur Van Helmont's going to the Quaker meetings."[120]

A month after More's letter, he received a reply. Although Anne denied van Helmont was holding Quaker meetings, the letter could have done little to set More's mind at ease. She thanks More for sending her his refutation of Keith's theory that Christ's soul extends throughout the universe and politely says that while she thinks More's criticisms have "much strength and solidity in them,"[121] she still believes much of what Keith says has merit. Her letter is one of the longest she ever wrote, ill health making the exertion nearly impossible, and she ends it with an eloquent and revealing defense of her interest in the Quakers. They are a suffering people, she tells More, and their patience and resignation provide an example for her in the face of her own suffering:

> I think you mistook me in what I writt of the Quakers. . . . I am of your opinion, that there are many bad people amongst them, as well as of other professions, and doe also beleeve, that their converse with you might be of good use to them, for the clearing up of their understanding, and advancing of their progresse towards the best things and therefore that your Conversation with them at London might be as you expresse it charitably intended, like that of a Physitian frequenting his patients for the increase or confirmation of their health, but I must professe that my converse with them is upon a contrary account, to receive health and refreshment from them. They have been and are a suffering people and are taught from the consolation [that] has been experimentally felt by them under their great tryals to administer comfort upon occasion to others in great distresse, and as Solomon sayes, a word in due season is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.[122] The weight of my affliction lies so very heavy upon me, that it is incredible how very seldom I can endure anyone in my chamber, but I find them so still, and very serious, that the company of such of them as I have hitherto seene, will be accepted by me, as long as I am capable of enjoying any; the particular acquaintance with such living examples of great patience under sundry heavy exercises, both of bodily sicknesse and other calamitys (as some of them have related to me) I find begetts a more lively fayth and uninterrupted desire of approaching to such a behaviour in like exigencyes, then the most learned and Rhetorical discourse of resignation can doe, though such also are good and profitable in their season. . .

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[119] More to Conway, 10 January 1676, *CL*, p. 419.
[120] ibid.
[121] Conway to More, 4 February 1676, ibid., p. 420.
[122] Proverbs 25:11.

> I pray God give us all a clear discerning betweene Melancholy Enthusiasme and true Inspiration that we may not be imposed upon to believe a lye. . . .[123]

In his reply More seems relieved that he can ascribe Conway's interest in the Quakers to her illness:

> I read the latter part of your letter that declares your design in being served in your chamber by Quakers to two or three of my friends, judicious persons, and they could not blame your designe, but look'd upon it as a thing reasonable in your condition. That God would be pleased to give you more strength and less paine. . . .[124]

His relief did not last long. There was a great deal more to Anne Conway's interest in Quakers than More would admit. Her illness was an important factor, but her eventual decision to become a Quaker was entirely rational. In her view the Quakers represented the best in Christianity: "their principles and practices (at least most of them) as far as I am capable to judge are Christian and Apostolical; and the most of them as farr as I can see or hear live as they preach."[125]

In the summer and fall of 1676 van Helmont's and Conway's connection with the Quakers became closer. In May, Keith wrote to Robert Barclay, urging him to visit Ragley again. This time he hopes Barclay will have more time to spend with Anne, "which might be usefull to her, and also to van Helmont."[126] Barclay's second visit to Ragley was a success; it made as great an impression on van Helmont as it did on Barclay. Perhaps it was the result of van Helmont's encounter and conversations with Barclay that he took the final step and declared himself a Quaker. By the spring of 1677 the news of van Helmont's conversion was widely known.

The first indication of it, however, came in October of 1676 when van Helmont traveled to Holland at the request of his old friend Christian August. The trip is mentioned by Hilarius Prache, a friend of van Helmont's, who served Christian August as an assistant pastor before he left the Lutheran Church to join the Quakers in England. Writing on October 9, 1676, Prache says:

> A few weeks ago the Herzog of Sulzbach was in Holland and ordered that Helmontius, who was formerly his adviser, should proceed from England to him in order to direct him to Quaker meetings in Amsterdam and Rotterdam (which he on various occasions attended). . . . At present Helmontius is again in this country, staying with a certain Earl who is a member of Parliament. He often comes to London, and a fortnight ago he paid me a visit.[127]

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[123] *CL.*, pp. 421-422.

[124] More to Conway, 26 February 1676, ibid., pp. 425-426.

[125] Conway to More, 4 February 1676, ibid., p. 422.

[126] Keith to Barclay, 12 May 1676, ibid., p. 427.

[127] Prache to Martin John, *Unschuldige Nachrichten von alten und neuen Theologischen Sachen,* (Leipzig 1706, p. 440): "Vor wenig wochen ist der Herzog von Sulzbach in Holland gewesen/ und hat von hier aus Engeland zu sich dahin verschrieben den Helmontium, seinen voriger Zeit gewesenen Rath/ der ihn zu Amsterdam und Roterdam in der Quaker meeting (denen er untersheidlich beygewohnt) weisen mussen. . . Anietzo ist Hel-montius weider hier im Lande bye einem Grafen/ der ein Parlaments-Herr is/ kommet offt nach Londen/ wie er denn

Barclay knew of van Helmont's conversion. Perhaps it occurred at Ragley while he was still there. In November 1676 he wrote to van Helmont, referring to his conversion and cautioning him in the frank and ponderous style typical of the Quakers. Barclay had been attracted by van Helmont, but he was well aware of his complex and volatile temperament. He warns van Helmont against the very things that later caused his separation from the Quakers: his restless, questioning mind and his hatred of any form of censorship:

> Dear Friend. The love of God in my Soul which I felt to move towards thee upon my first acquaintance with thee doth draw & constrain me thus to salute thee, that the remembrance of his love to thee (for which I desire in thy behalf to praise him) may not be forgotten by thee who in thy latter age after long wandering & seeking & much wearisome both of body and mind hath brought thee in measure to see & acknowledge the dawning of his glorious day among his despised Children who are not of the wise & prudent & great of this world but the foolish and contemptible yet such the breathings of those whose souls nothing could satisfie besides & below the enjoyment of the pretious life of Jesus as inwardly revealed in them to the quieting, cleansing & satisfying of their souls, the Lord who hath given them heirof, give thee also the inward sence of it, that thou may not only see, acknowledge & admire it in others but receive, possess & enjoy it in thyself & be leavened by the inward and powerful work of it to the quieting of these various & wandring thoughts & multiplicity of images that cumber thy mind, as also that abundance or words which proceeds therefrom that so both inward and outward silence may become they place & thou may grow up no less in the possession and enjoyment of the thing itself than in the conception & comprehension of it, above all things beware thou suffer not the enemy to betray thee by giving way to the dry wisdom of this world neither seek through the prudent considerations thereof to carve & cut out thy work & place for thyself as Judging thou may be most serviceable in such and such circumstances but be thou in simplicity and humility fully resigned to the Lord to be ordered & disposed by him not suffering thy mind to run before to choose thy own way & refuse not to obey & yield to his convictions however foolish the appearance be, leave the Issue to the Lord for the foolishness of God is wiser than man, he knows what can propagate & advance his work best, therefore my dear Friend be subject to him in all thinges & be not wise above the lowly witness of God in thy heart & so much the rather as thy example & Influence therein may be hurtfull to others who will be more apt to be Influenced by thy practise than convinced by thy reasonings be carefull then lest by seeking to uphold the ark in thy own wisdom thou give it a wrong touch, but follow the Lord faithfully who can lead through all & remember that obedience is better than sacrifice[128] I desire that in my freedom to thee (which I hope thy Ingenuity can bear) I may be manifest to that of God in thy Prosperity from which this proceeds. . . know assuredly that thou art often much in tender love remembered by
>
> Thy real friend
>
> Barclay[129]

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erst vor 14 Tagen mich besucht." The English translation of this passage comes from Edward Bernstein, "Letters of Hilary Prache and John G. Matern," p. 5.

[128] 1 Samuel 15:22.

[129] Barclay to van Helmont, 17 November 1676, *Reliquae Barclaianae*, pp. 9-10.

This letter is fascinating for the character sketch it gives of van Helmont, the man who finds it easier to be vigorously active than quietly contemplative. Van Helmont was always in the process of doing something; he was a philosopher who was also a painter, weaver, carpenter, turner, and shoemaker. Barclay illustrates this frame of mind when he says, "remember that obedience is better than sacrifice." For van Helmont the concept of obedience naturally gave way to acts of charity and asceticism.

Unfortunately there is a gap in the correspondence between More and Conway that extends throughout the decisive period of her conversion to Quakerism; consequently there is no way to date it exactly. It would seem likely, however, that she and van Helmont took the step at the same time. For van Helmont this occurred in the fall of 1676, as Prache's letter shows. By 1677 Anne Conway had adopted the Quaker practice of addressing everyone, regardless of rank or fortune, with the familiar "thee" and "thou."[130] By April of the same year news of her conversion had become common knowledge. More writes in a postscript to his letter of that month:

> What a peal my Lord Chancellour rang in my eares about your being turned Quaker, and what a storme I bore with be too rehearse in this letter, I told him I would either write to your Ladyship or declare by word of mouth what he sayd when I see you.[131]

More never did write or, if he did, his letter has failed to survive; perhaps he felt the matter was too serious for paper and pen and hoped he would have better results by talking to Anne Conway when he came to Ragley for his annual visit. Under the pressure of work, More delayed his journey until the summer. By that time both she and van Helmont were so settled in their newly-embraced opinion that nothing More could say shook them from it.

The news of van Helmont's and Conway's conversion spread into Germany to van Helmont's friends, the Palatine Princes and Princesses. Sophie and her husband Ernst August, who was at that time the Bishop of Osnabruck, were the first to know. From there the news passed to Sophie's sister, Elizabeth, and her brother, Karl Ludwig, at whose residence van Helmont had first come into contact with Quakers. On 28 May 1677, Elizabeth wrote to her brother, referring directly to van Helmont's great love of the Quakers and, implicitly, to Anne Conway and Ragley, where the majority of the servants were Quakers:

> I will only add that our Helmont greatly loves these people and says that their life is just like that of the Apostles, and that the nobility of England desire to have them in their service because of their honesty and Fayfulness.[132]

Another letter written by Sophie to Karl Ludwig reveals an even more interesting, but not unexpected, piece of information. According to Sophie, van Helmont, the recently converted Quaker, was still very much a Kabbalist:

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[130] *CL*, p. 534, n.1.
[131] More to Conway, 3 April 1677, *CL*, p. 430.
[132] Princess Elizabeth to Karl Ludwig, 18/28 May 1677, Hauck, *Die Briefe*, pp. 253-254.

> Mr. Helmont is here on his return from England. Only his hair and teeth show his advancing age. He has great notions (*di belli concetti*) about metempsychosis, which is at present the most popular religion in England.[133]

She adds, in her usual down-to-earth and amusing way, that with no recollection of one's former lives she finds it hard to see anything of value in the idea of reincarnation: "what good does it do me now if I was a Caesar or an Alexander, since I do not know anything about it, and, equally, what harm would it do me if my soul were to enter a pig?"[134] Sophie had written to her brother seven years before about van Helmont's interest in metempsychosis; even then she could not accept the idea.[135] In 1677 van Helmont was still full of the same theory.

By June of 1677 van Helmont's intellectual assent to Quakerism had become an active and physical one as well, a progress from thought to activity characteristic of his behavior in general. At this time van Helmont refused to remove his hat in the presence of nobility, following the Quaker custom that had made such a strong impression on him back in 1659. Robert Barclay describes this aspect of van Helmont's behavior in a letter to Princess Elizabeth:

> Thy friend Helmont is here, & about 2 or 3 weeks ago found himself under a necessity so as he could not forbear with peace of conscience & without disobeying of God to come under the contemptible appearance of one of us by keeping his hat upon his head & laying aside those other ceremonies which truth has obliged us to depart from & his so doing did not a little surprise thy brother & the Lord Craven with whom he had occasion to meet the other day the last of whom telling him he would write for news to thy sister Sophia, Helmont himself was willing I should prevent thy knowing it by any other hand.[136]

Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz, whose friendship and collaboration with van Helmont is the subject of a separate chapter, also heard the news of van Helmont's conversion and his refusal to remove his hat and conform to prevailing rules of civility. He passes the information on in a letter to Landgraf Ernst van Hessen-Rheinfels, adding that he cannot really believe van Helmont would act in such a radical fashion:

> As for M. Helmont, I am told that he is entirely quakerized, and that he does not bare his head when he speaks to princes. I have a hard time believing this because when I used to speak to him fairly often and familiarly eight years ago, he seemed to me entirely reasonable and since then I have esteemed him

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[133] Bodemann, *Briefwechsel der Herzogin Sophie mit Karl Ludwig*, p. 285: "M. Helmond est icy de son retour d'Engleterre, qui n'est vieilli que par les cheveux et par les dents. Il a di belli concetti sur la metteamsicause, qui est presentement la religion la plus a la mode en Engleterre."

[134] ibid., p. 284: "a quoi me sert il presentement, si j'avois este Cesar ou Alesandre, puisque je n'en scay rien quel mal me feroit il aussi, si mon ame entroit dans un porc?"

[135] ibid., p. 150: "M. Helmond est encore icy; il m'a donne son livre qui me sera fort utile. J'estudie la metamsicause avec luy, mais jusques a cette heure elle me surpasse; je ne la connois que dans les chenilles, je ne say, si Dieu nous fera la mesme grace."

[136] Robert Barclay to the Princess Elizabeth, *Reliquae Barclaianae*, pp. 21-22.

> highly. Indeed, it is quite enough to have been put to the test of the Inquisition.[137]

As radical as Leibniz was as a philosopher, he was a social conservative and uncomfortable with the idea of defying social conventions. In an intensely formal and class conscious age like the seventeenth century, refusing to remove one's hat in the presence of social superiors was considered a radically anarchic and infuriating act, which merited the kind of harsh treatment the Quakers received. Perhaps it was at this time that van Helmont began to dress like the Quakers, a habit he never changed even after his separation from them. Leibniz describes van Helmont as he appeared in 1696, some twenty years later; he was struck by the simplicity of van his clothing:

> Baron Francis Mercury van Helmont, the son of the famous chemist with the same name, was an old friend of Madam the Electress of Hanover. . . . He dressed in a suit of brown cloth of the kind worn by the Quakers. He also wore a coat of the same color and a hat without plumes [sans audaces], so that one would have taken him for an artisan rather than a Baron.[138]

While the Palatine family was interested in van Helmont's conversion to Quakerism, the Quakers were no less interested in them as possible converts. The Quakers were indefatigable travelers and proselytizers. During the 1670s they traveled throughout Germany and Holland in an attempt to convert members of numerous and varied schismatic Protestant sects, such as the Collegiants, Labadists, and followers of Antoinette Bourignon. They were also eager to convert members of the nobility in order to gain support and respectability for their Society. Princess Elizabeth and her entire family were high up on the list of desirable converts. She had shown interest in both the Quakers and the unorthodox sect of Labadists, whose members she had sheltered on her property and protected from persecution. The Quakers, and especially Barclay, saw a possible parallel between Princess Elizabeth and Anne Conway. For the latter, what had begun in intellectual curiosity had ended in conversion and total commitment. Barclay pressed this possible parallel by writing to Princess Elizabeth a long length about Anne Conway's conversion. Princess Elizabeth's reply, however, was a cold rebuff:

> I cannot submit unto the opinion or practise of any other, though I grant that they have more light than myself. The Countesse of Cononway [sic] doth well to go on the way that she thinks best, but I should not doe well to follow her, unless I had the same conviction, neither did it ever enter into my thoughts to do so.[139]

The Quakers were not deterred by this reply. They continued in their efforts to "convince" (the Quaker synonym for convert) Princess Elizabeth. They

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[137] AK I, 3: 260.

[138] Klopp, *Correspondence de Leibniz avec l'Electrice Sophie*, II: 8: "M. Francois Mercure Baron de Helmont, fils du celebre medecin de ce nom, estoit une vielle connoissance de Mad. l'Electrice d'Hanover. . . . Il estoit vestu d'un habit de drap brun a la maniere des Trembleurs. Il portoit aussi an manteau de la mesme couleur, et un chapeau san audaces, qu'on l'auroit plustost pris pour un artisan que pour un Baron."

[139] Princess Elizabeth to Robert Barclay, *Reliquae Barclaianae*, p. 27.

planned a second visit to her at Herford in 1677, a trip that originally included van Helmont.[140] Van Helmont did not go, however, probably because he had just returned to England from Germany the preceding June and was anxious to return to Ragley.

By the time van Helmont reached Ragley, Anne Conway was a confirmed Quaker. The Quakers were able to do more for her than any other group or single person. Henry More had tried to give her support, urging the same spirit of prayerfulness and resignation the Quakers did. But More, in the retirement of his modest home at Cambridge, was unable to make his words live. He could not speak for her suffering in the same way that the Quakers apparently could. They were a living example of patience and resignation in the face of great bodily discomfort—the pain, cold, hunger and squalor of continual imprisonments and public harassment had not the power to dampen the "refreshment" they felt "in the Lord," a phrase they repeatedly used to describe the effects of their suffering. Nothing Anne Conway had yet tried, neither the incessant and extreme use of medicines, nor her continual attempt to overpower physical pain by the sheer will of intellect had helped. The Quakers were her final resort, and in the exigencies of pain, she tried to emulate their joy. Van Helmont was similarly struck by the ability of the Quakers to turn suffering to advantage. He felt, as she felt, that the Quakers could only have a special gift from God to act as they did: "It would be a strange thing to think that men should be able to endure such great and long sufferings even unto Death without Divine power to support them."[141]

The Quakers had accomplished more at Ragley than they probably ever dreamed possible. They had sown their message into the heart of an aristocratic family, and it had taken deep root. Even Henry More, Anne Conway's

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[140] ibid., pp. 23-24.

[141] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Iv. In his history of the Quakers, William Sewel gives a vivid description of Quaker persecution during the year van Helmont and Conway became Quakers: "At Francay in Gloucestershire, the Justice, John Merideth, behaved himself exceedingly furious in disturbing the Quakers Meetings; for he himself did not only beat them, but more than once drew his Knife, to mark them, as he called it, had he not been restrained by his Servants, who for all that could not prevent his taking some by the Hair of their Head, and pulling them away: Nay, the Havock and Spoil which was made, was so extravagant, that from one Thomas Holbrow, an ancient blind man, they took his Bed from under him, so that he had his Wife lay about a Quarter of a year on Straw; and when his Friends provided him with some Clothing against Winter, Part of that was also taken from him: For such Plundering now went on with a full Career; and the basest Men were authorized to deprive others of their Goods, if there was but a Justice that favoured such" (pp. 545-546).

Even Croese, who was hostile towards the Quakers, could not refrain from marveling at their fortitude in his *The General History of the Quakers*. Having described the persecutions to which the Quakers were accustomed, he comments: "the Quakers suffered and endured all these things from the very beginning, with so much Patience and Resolution of Mind, that they not only wearied many of their Enemies, but also excited and enclined many People to become of their Communion; thus judging with themselves, that Men neither would nor could undergo and sustain such intolerable Troubles and Miseries, unless they were very well assured in their Consciences of the truth of those things for which they suffered, even as the Quakers themselves pretended, That this their Patience for their Faith which they turned to the Glory of Martyrdom, joyned with their singular way of Life and Manners, was the principal Seed of their Church both then and at all times" (I: 100).

old friend and adviser and a frequent visitor at Ragley, became part of a past that no longer had relevance for her. The discussion More had hoped to have about Quakerism was, instead, a lament against an accomplished fact. Lord Conway, describes the state of affairs that More found on his summer visit. Writing to his brother Sir George Rawdon on June 23, Lord Conway reveals his own dismay, even disgust, at the way Quakers had invaded his home and taken advantage of his hospitality to the detriment of his finances. He insists that his wife is not a Quaker, but this had more to do with his own and Henry More's wishful thinking than reality:

> All that I have to depend upon either for my own substance or helping your sons must come out of Ireland, for I have not a shilling here, and I shall be glad if this here will hold out for my wife. Dr More, Mr Wilson and others dined with me today in the parlor at a very plentiful table, but Monsr. Van Helmont with six or seven Quakers dined in some other room in the house as plentifully as we, both for meat and wine, and nothing [wanted] of what we had, so they supped last night, and lodge here, and I never see them, and all their horses in the stables better fed than mine, and when I am absent the house is as full of them as it can hold. How long this will last I know not, for I have not yet seen my wife since I came, but both my own knowledge and from Dr More I can assure you that my wife is no Quaker. I know she is very much against persecuting them, and thinks some of them extraordinary good persons, and Monsr. Van Helmont hath wrought himself extremely into my wife's good opinion, so as to think him the necessariest person in the world about her. But I cannot bear these things always, I am loath to be rash, and therefore desire to advise with my friends. To injure Monsr. Van Helmont is to injure my wife in the sensiblest part, but it is from him that all the reproach of her being a Quaker and a thousand other stories proceeds, and she says she is content to bear it, but I swear I'll not be at the expense of *f*2,000 a year to entertain his associates. I am almost mad when I begin to write of this subject, and therefore I'll leave off at this time.[142]

Writing again to his brother a year later on December 28, 1677, Lord Conway discourages him from sending his daughter to visit because of continual presence of Quakers in his household:

> In your last you signify your intentions of sending your daughter into England, to which I should willingly agree, if I knew where she could be conveniently placed. In my family all the women about my wife, and most of the rest, are Quakers, and Mons. Van Helmont is governour of that flock, an unpleasing sort of people, silent, sullen, and of a removed conversation, which can be no ways agreeable to your daughter, nor for her advantage. These and all of that society have free access to my wife, but I believe Dr. More, though he was in the house all the last summer, did not see her above twice or thrice.[143]

In the year before her death, Anne's friendship with More lost its close, personal flavor and became strained and almost formal. One learns from Richard Ward, More's biographer, how much pain this caused More:

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[142] *CL*, pp. 534-5. Lord Conway tried to hide his wife's conversion (San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HA 14558).

[143] Lord Conway to Sir George Rawdon, *CL*, pp. 439-440.

> Now as to the *Doctor's* real Trouble, under this unexpected Scene at *Ragley*; it. . . affected him so much at length, that he receiv'd the Account of it with Tears, and labour'd all that a Faithful Friend could do, to set her right, as to her Judgment in these Matters. He both convers'd with, and wrote to *these* Persons, and made Remarks. . . as particularly on Mr. *Keith's Immediate Revelation*. He wrote to Mr. *Pen* a very excellent Letter concerning *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*. . . . And for their great leader (as most account of him) *George Fox* himself, hath said to some; *That in conversing with him, he felt himself, as it were, turned into Brass*. So much did the Spirit, Crookedness, or Perverseness of that Person, move and offend his Mind. . . .
>
> As he argued thus Occasionally with these heads of the *Quakers*, and exercis'd his Pen both for *this Lady's*, and *their own* Benefit; so he was not wanting in his more particular Applications to *her self*. (And great Pity it is, that the *Letters* are not to be seen, that he wrote to her on this Occasion.) But when he saw, that he could not sufficiently prevail, he was forced to desist; and leave that Great Person to enjoy in her Extremities the Company and the Ways that she most fancied.[144]

More's attitude towards the Quakers did soften somewhat in his later years, partly as a result of his great affection for his "heroine pupil," as he had called Anne Conway many years before.[145] He never could subscribe to their singularities of dress, manner and speech, for this smacked of sectarianism. But he came to appreciate the sincerity of some Quakers and even to see that their thought was not as unorthodox as he had supposed.[146]

In 1678 the stream of Quakers who were constantly coming to Ragley was crowned by a visit from their leader, George Fox. Anne Conway had an entirely different reaction to Fox than More had had. As Fox wrote in his Journal, the Quakers at Ragley were "very glad yt G. ff [George Fox] came."[147]

In the months after this visit, the few remaining months of her life, Anne Conway became a proselytizer for the Quakers in her own right. The Quakers who came to Ragley kept her well-informed as to what was happening to the Friends throughout England. Disturbed by their stories of imprisonment and persecution, she did everything in her power to alleviate the Quakers' distress. Not only did she try to make her dismayed family understand her conversion, but she also entreated them to intervene on behalf of the Quakers. It is an example of Lord Conway's undiminished kindness to

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[144] Ward, *The Life of the Learned and Pious Doctor Henry More. . .*, pp. 197-198.

[145] *CL*, p. 46.

[146] In an undated letter to Knorr from Keith that was probably written in 1675, Keith says, "I hope, therefore, that it will come to pass for me and for many, nay for all who know this distinguished man, that he, an honest man and my friend, will publish to the world some testimony in our favor which will soften and all but remove that harsh, too severe, and scarcely true expression of his words concerning us in the above mentioned book. Indeed, I have spoken to him about this matter and I have some hope from his words that he will do something of this sort as God bestows life and opportunity" (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf 30.4 Extrav. Auftrags-Nr 5519, f. 20). Yet a scholium in the *Divine Dialogues* in his *Opera Omnia* (1679) revives his earlier more stringent attack. Here he refers to Quakers as "larvae" of anarchy and civil unrest.

[147] Fox, "The Haistwell Diary," in *The Short Journal and Itinerary Journals of George Fox*, p. 267.

his wife, even after her illness and conversion to Quakerism prevented her from sharing his life, that he agreed to befriend the Quakers at her request. His loyalty to his wife overcame the considerable antipathy he felt towards the Quakers as the letter he wrote to her in October 1678 reveals:

> All Quaker wives whose husbands I acquainted you formerely were in prison, are at this instant in the House waiting for me because Mr. Lovell the Chancellour hath appointed this day to give me an answer about them. All the matter is, I must pay the Fees my self, yet I hope to have them released before night, and what service sever I can doe you I shall always do it, but I finned them to be a senseless, willful ridiculous generation of people, rather to be pitied then envied.[148]

Lord Conway expressed his distaste for the Quakers in another letter to his wife the following January:

> He [Frank Parsons?] tells me that you ordered him to returnee me thanks for my kindness to your friends in the truth. If you reckon them all so that are in the profession I assure you have a pack as arrant knaves to your friends as any I know.[149]

In her reply Anne ignores her husband's disparaging remarks; she simply sends him and his brother some Quaker books and hopes that they will speak for her. This was Anne Conway's final letter to her husband, and she writes as one who has finally attained the peace the Quakers promised would come from a sincere resignation to the will of God.[150] By the time Lord Conway's reply reached Ragley, she was too ill to read it. After two weeks of terrible pain, on the 23rd February, she died, "having her perfect understanding and senses to the last minute, giving up her Spirit very peaceable without any perceivable motion and keeping a very sweet face, her pains have held her to the last."[151] So wrote Charles Coke, Anne Conway's secretary, to Lord Conway on the day of her death.

Lady Conway died at the age of forty-nine. Van Helmont performed his last service to her as a chemist. He preserved her body in spirits of wine and enclosed it in a double coffin with a glass lining so that her husband could have a final look at her before burial. Like the succession of physicians before him, van Helmont had been unable to cure Anne Conway or even lessen her pain. He had not aided her as a physician, but he had supported her all along in her progress towards Quakerism. Medicine had failed where faith succeeded. Van Helmont the Kabbalist-Quaker had been of more assistance than van Helmont the healer.

There was no ceremony at Anne Conway's funeral. She was buried as she had wished with nothing more than "Quaker Lady" scratched across her

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[148] 30 October 1678, *CL*, pp. 443-444.
[149] 8 January 1679, ibid., p. 446.
[150] ibid., pp. 448-449.
[151] Charles Coke to Lord Conway, 23 February 1679, ibid., p. 451.

coffin. Her husband exactly followed the codicil she had made to her will, asking not to be buried according to the rites of the Anglican Church.[152]

Had it not been for the efforts made by van Helmont and Henry More to see that Anne Conway's *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* was published, we would only know her as she appears in the *Conway Letters*, as a highly intelligent, charming, and educated women with a penchant for philosophy. But with her treatise in hand, we can see just how deeply she thought about the philosophical and theological issues that divided the intellectual and religious community at the time. Conway was more, however, than an armchair philosopher; in her restricted way, she was also an activist. Yes, she was confined to her room as an invalid, but even there she had to fight against her own ingrained, anti-democratic views. Upper class people of her generation did not take kindly to those who denied the superiority of the privileged. Her brother, Heneage Finch, for example, was appalled at the Quaker use of "thee" and "thou" precisely because it called into question the entire and entrenched class system.[153] Hierarchical notions of rank and order provided the foundation for every existing social and political institution from that of monarchy to marriage. Anne appeared at first to have had similar scruples. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth, Robert Barclay remarked that Conway had trouble adopting the Quaker mode of speaking. That she overcame her prejudices in the course of studying philosophy and the Kabbalah is another indication of how exceptional she was.[154]

There was little to keep van Helmont in England after Conway's death. He kept up his contact with the Quakers; his name is listed with Keith's among those present at the London meeting for suffering on 5 June 1679.[155] But the bond which had linked him so strongly to the Quakers had been Anne Conway herself; after her death the same stimulus was no longer there. Although he never completely disassociated himself from the spirit and manners of the Quakers, van Helmont's mind strayed back into its accustomed channels. The Kabbalah reasserted its predominant hold on his thought and within a few years brought him into conflict with the Quakers, the group from which he had hoped so much.

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[152] ibid., p. 481.
[153] London, British Library MS Add 23,214, fols. 94ff.
[154] CL, p. 534, n. 1.
[155] London, Friends' House, MS "London Meeting for Suffering," 4 June 1679.

CHAPTER TEN

HENRY MORE, THE KABBALAH, AND THE QUAKERS

The previous chapter described the chagrin Henry More felt as he helplessly watched his two friends, Anne Conway and Francis Mercury van Helmont, immerse themselves in the Kabbalah and become Quakers. It was obviously difficult for More to see himself being supplanted as Anne Conway's intellectual mentor by Francis Mercury van Helmont. However much More liked and respected van Helmont, which he did, he was convinced that van Helmont's kabbalistic theories were deeply flawed.[1] It is the purpose of this chapter to look more closely at More's reaction to van Helmont's ideas and to investigate the reason why, in the end, he felt compelled to reject what had initially attracted him.

On the surface the friendship that developed between More and van Helmont seems highly improbable. How could Henry More, that implacable enemy of enthusiasm and sectarianism, have developed such close personal and intellectual ties to a man whose life and thought seem so profoundly inimical to everything that More stood for? Van Helmont, whose quixotic, paradoxical spirit was attested by everyone, was an archetypal enthusiast. His religious enthusiasm was plain for all to see, including More, but no less evident was his reputation as an enthusiast in science. As the son and intellectual heir of Jan Baptista van Helmont he was an exponent in his own right of that "Familiasticall-Levelling-Magicall temper" so decried by all those who denounced, as More did, the radicalism of the Civil War period.[2] When More welcomed his eccentric guest to his chambers in Christ's College, one wonders if he remembered his earlier contention that all "chymists" suffered from "flatulent melancholia," a diagnosis of partial insanity he had subsequently dropped in favor of straight diabolism.[3] As a Neoplatonist, Henry More shared the repugnance felt by his Greek mentors for things manual and empirical. Some years before his meeting with van Helmont he had rather tactlessly told that indefatigable empiricist William Petty exactly how inane he judged the work of experimental scientists to be.[4] Yet under the

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[1] In a postscript to a letter to Conway, More writes, "I was thinking to write to Monsieur Van Helmont, but I thought it over grievous to add the vexation of my scribl'd hand to all grievances I have done him at Ragley. But your Ladisip will be pleas'd to present my affectionate service to him, whose excellent primitive-Christian conversation I never behold nor remember with out a great deal of love and admiration of him. I am every ways so oblig'd to him that I am like a desperate debtour that can pay nothing at least for the present. But if there ever be any opportunity of doing him any reall service that lyes in my power, I shall doe it with gladnesse" (May 9, 1673, *CL*, p. 370).

[2] Thomas Hall, *Vindiciae Litterarum*, p. 199.

[3] Cited in Jobe, "The Glanvil-Webster Debate: The Devil in Restoration Science." Also see More's censure of experimental philosophy in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, p. 36.

[4] Webster, "Henry More and Descartes: Some New Sources," p. 365.

influence of van Helmont, More would soon become an experimentalist himself.[5]

These obvious temperamental and intellectual incompatibilities should have precluded the friendship between More and van Helmont. Even more to the point, however, is the fact that More's eventual rejection of van Helmont's philosophy appears in retrospect to have been something of a replay of his earlier reaction to Thomas Vaughan, whom More had called, among other things, a "chymicall monkey."[6] The controversy between More and Vaughan revolved around the same issues More was to bring up later in connection with van Helmont, the Quakers, and the Kabbalah. In the books More wrote against Vaughan in the 1650s he charged Vaughan with being an enthusiast, a pantheist, and a materialist. These charges were of profound significance because in More's estimation they inevitably led to atheism, and for More atheism was synonymous with anarchy.[7] As we shall see, these were precisely the charges More was to level against Quakers and Kabbalists.

For all their ostensible differences, there were, nevertheless, definite reasons why More should have been attracted to van Helmont and through him to the Kabbalah and Quakerism, just as there had been reasons why More had been attracted to Vaughan's philosophy. The violence of More's reaction in both cases is a measure of this attraction. In the end, however, More rejected as excessive doctrines he was tempted to embrace.[8]

In *Radical Religious Movements in Early Modern Europe*, Michael Mullet has drawn up a list of traits characteristic of the "lay religious impulse" of the period. His list is suggestive because so many of the traits apply equally well to the religious outlook of Henry More, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and even George Fox. What divides these men is not so much the substance of their thought, but the degree of emphasis they placed on individual points. Mullett's list includes: 1) an emphasis on immediate contact with God, either through Scripture or the spirit within; 2) a stress on experience rather than established truth; 3) a refusal to accept the orthodox teaching of the Trinity; 4) speculation about the existence of heaven and hell;

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[5] Coudert, "Henry More and Witchcraft."

[6] *Observations Upon Anthroposophia Theomagica.*

[7] On the question of atheism and the anxiety and fear it generated, see Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, ch. 7; Hunter and Wootton, eds. *Atheism in Early Modern Europe*; Popkin and Vanderjagt, eds., *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.*

[8] In her article, "Henry More, Thomas Vaughan and the Late Renaissance Magical Tradition," Guinsberg argues that More actually came to accept in later life many of Vaughan's ideas. Hutin takes a more extreme position in *Henry More: Essai sur les doctrines theosophiques chez les Platoniciens de Cambridge*, where he argues that More was an outright theosophist in the tradition of Vaughan and van Helmont. Hutin is able to do this because he mistakenly attributes van Helmont's opinions to More. See Staudenbauer's review of Hutin. Brann's analysis is more accurate when he describes the conflict between More and Vaughan as "more of a fraternal rivalry within the same family than as a combat between. . . radically divergent world views" ("The Conflict between Reason and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England: A Case Study of the Vaughan-More Debate").

5) a tendency towards limiting or rejecting the doctrine of predestination and a consequent leaning toward the Pelagian view that man can contribute to his own salvation; 6) the rejection of the distinction between priest and layman as well as the notion of an established church; and 7) hostility to tithes. Mullet suggests other consistent themes as well, such as the persistence of millenarianism, the fight for liberty of conscience, an emphasis on practical morality, and an attack on privilege. Out of this comprehensive list only a few points are not consonant with the thought of Henry More. He did not dispute the doctrine of the Trinity; nor as a staunch defender of the Anglican Church, did he advocate its disestablishment or object to tithes. More importantly, by no stretch of the imagination can Henry More be accused of political radicalism. He was not infected with a "levelling" tempter, but accepted class privilege as natural and just. More's political and social conservatism was undermined to a large extent, however, by the implicit radicalism of his critique of the hypocrisy and aridity of the established Church and by his advocacy of a religion that came from the heart.[9] More speaks as frequently as any Quaker of the "inner light," although he criticized it in others.[10] With his emphasis on the practical fruits of religious beliefs, he had more in common with the Quakers than he himself realized. He was both surprised and offended when he heard that George Keith attributed his conversion to Quakerism to reading More's *Grand Mystery of Godliness*.[11] But there was much in More's book, as well as in his other writings, that would have been entirely acceptable to a Quaker. More's emphasis on the primacy of love among the divine attributes, for example, was a theme he and Quaker apologists shared. Like the Quakers and so many other sectarians, More rejected the doctrine of predestination. His description of his disaffiliation from Calvinism while a boy on the playing fields of Eton points to the consistent optimism and humanity characteristic of his subsequent religious outlook.[12] The emphasis More placed in all his writings on the goodness and compassion of God led him to deemphasize the idea of eternal torment and to accept the possibility of reincarnation as a way of providing sinners with another chance. That the pre-existence of souls was the subject of More's first conversation with van Helmont suggests their common interests and orientation. Theology was not, however, the only area that provided common ground between the two men. They also shared deeply held assumptions about natural philosophy. They were adamantly opposed to Cartesian dualism as well as to the new mechanical philosophy and subscribed instead to the kind of Neoplatonic vitalism characteristic of

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[9] "O *Philopolos*, he that is a Candidate for the Kingdom of God, let him above all things cultivate the Heart; for through this only is the Inlet into the Kingdom of Light" (*The Divine Dialogues*, 2: 37).

[10] "The Quakers Principle is the most safe and reasonable here, to keep close to the Light within a Man" (Ward, quoting a letter written by More in *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr. Henry More*, p. 247).

[11] *CL*, p. 341.

[12] Ward, *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr. Henry More*, pp. 5-7.

Renaissance Neoplatonists and their followers. Thus there were broad areas of agreement between the two men, which go a long way to explain their mutal affection for one another.

Although no record exists of the conversation between More and van Helmont at their first meeting, something of its flavor can be gleaned from reading the letter van Helmont brought with him to More from Knorr von Rosenroth. Van Helmont and Knorr had been very impressed by More's works when they read them in Germany. Knowing that van Helmont would contact More upon his arrival in England, Knorr set out in his letter some of the issues that he and van Helmont were most interested in, hoping to solicit More's opinions.

Knorr's opening remarks are fulsome in their praise of More as someone who had effectively criticized Descartes and "restored" the spiritual philosophy and theology of the Platonists. Knorr describes himself as a fellow Platonist trying, like More, to work out a "spiritual-physical system" of his own:

> Most worthy and excellent Sir, most honored Sir,
> When your philosophical, theological and poetical writings (along with a few others published by your Latitudinarians) reached my hands, I acknowledge that so much light came to me, engaged in these difficult studies in my spare time, that I said that just as Descartes was the restorer of natural philosophy, so you are the restorer of spiritual philosophy and theology. And when I saw that with the rise of Cartesian philosophy, certain things were discovered which were in need of greater light and that you sought in a friendly correspondence an elucidation of these points from Descartes himself, then I thought to ask in letters for a few clarifications from you, an author never sufficiently praised, about those things which you so clearly and recently proposed here and there concerning spiritual and theological matters. Moreover, not only does your humanity but also your Christian charity shine forth from your writings so greatly that I have no doubt concerning your friendly response, which I am utterly certain you will not deny me, a German man scarcely known and not to be compared with such great men of your rank, yet one who is a sincere Christian, a Lutheran, and although by profession a politician, nevertheless a Platonic philosopher, that is, a most eager lover of true wisdom.
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> And, indeed, since I have thought for a long time now not only about a complete physical system of the corporeal world but also about a spiritual-physical system of all things including spirit, may I, with your permission, frame the following questions for this purpose, with these basic suppositions in mind: that there is a God and that the creatures emanating perpetually from him are of dual nature, spirit and matter.[13]

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[13] Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod-Guel 30.4 Extrav. Auftrag-Nr, fol. 27: "Reverende plurimum atque Excellentissime Domine, Domine honorissime

Ex quo Scripta Tua tam Philosophica quam Theologica et Poetica cum paucis quibusdam aliis a Latitudinariis vestriis editis ad manus meas pervenerunt, confessim tanta lux mihi oborta est in arduis his studiis horis succesivis versanti, ut planè veluti Cartesium Philosophiae Naturalis, ita Te Pneumatices atque Theologiae Restitutorem dixerim. Cumque viderem Te quoque circa initia Philosophiae Cartesianae, inventis in illa quibusdam, quae majori luce egerunt, instituto amicabili quodam commericio literario illorum dilucidationem ab ipso Cartesio expetuisse, mox animum subiit circa illa quae Tu in Penumaticis atque Theologia tam accuratè hinc inde noviter proponis ex Te ipso quoque, ceu Autore numquam satis laudando, nonulla pro majori luce per literas quarere. Tanta autem undiquaque ex scriptis tuis elucescit

In the thirty queries that Knorr appends to these opening paragraphs he raises issues about the way the world was created, which in his view was through emanation; he asks More's opinion about the precise way in which spirit and body are joined; he asks about hell and purgatory; and he wants to know if More shares his opinion that there will be a time "when everything is restored to a pure state of happiness."

More's reply begins with equally fulsome praise of Knorr:

> Most distinguished Sir, I have read your letter, given to me by that most excellent man Lord Helmont, not once but twice with very great pleasure and with no less admiration for your fertile genius, which, although you are a politician by profession and almost continually distracted with matters of state, you have nevertheless embellished so many things with erudition. Not only are you well versed in languages but you have also cultivated with great success the liberal arts and knowledge of very abstruse matters. You have obtained such a wise and penetrating intellect that you examine and search out so adroitly and skillfully the most remote and minute nooks and crannies of the more hidden occult philosophy. My mind and thought have hardly ever encountered such a genius. Indeed, your honor and your favorable opinion of me and your candid judgement of my writings have brought it about that I have decided to respond as far as I can to the questions you raise. And I will do so, indeed, as clearly and briefly as possible.[14]

In the body of the letter More admits "how little versed [he is] in Jewish writings," and he answers Knorr's queries primarily by referring to passages in his published work. He takes a cautious position on the idea that creation occurred through emanation, an idea central Knorr's kabbalistic theories, suggesting it should be understood in a metaphorical rather than strictly philosophical sense:

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non tantum humanitas moralis, sed Charitas verè Christiana, ut nullus omninò dubitem de amicabili quodam Responso, quod homini quidem ignoto penitus, et cum tantis Tui ordinis Viris neutiquem comparando, Germani tamen, id est, sinceri animi Christiano, religione Evangelico; professione quamvis Politico, Philosopho Platonico tamen, id est, amatori verae Sapientiae studissimo, Te minimè denegaturum omnino confido.

Et quidem cum jam diu de integro quodam non tantum Physico mundi corporei, sed Pneumatico-Physico omnium Rerum adeopque de Apirituum Systemate sim meditatus, liceat mihi pace Tua suppositis primum immotis his fundamentis, Deum esse et Creaturas, ab illo perpetu emanantes duplices, Spiritus et Materiam; sequentes in illum finem formare quaestiones."

[14] ibid., fol. 23: "Literas tuas, Vir clarissime, per virum praestantissimum Dominum Helmontium mihi traditas semel atque iterum lege, et magna profectà cum voluntate; nec minori cum admiratione felicitatis ingenii tui qui cum sis professione politicus et perpetuo ferè negotio civilibus districtus tam multifariâ tamen eruditione ornatus es, atque non solum linguas calles sed et tot artes liberales rerumque abstruissimarum scientias tanto cum successu ex coluisti, quique tam sagax et penetrabile acumen nactus es ut remotissimos angulos subtillissimasque occultioris Philosophiae rimas tam dextre periteque perscruteris et explores, eo sanè absque quo vix mihi concessum est mentem cogitationemque meam ingerre. Verum tua ipsius dignitas animus que erga me propensus candidaque scriptorum meorum existimatio effecerunt ut quantum fieri poterit questionibus tuis propositis respondendum decreverim. Faciam vero quanta potero et brevitate et perspicuitate."

> I should note first here that the word to emanate should not be taken in a strict philosophical sense but should be understood metaphysically (lest imagination deceive reason) to signify only that all substances are created by God so that not even at the moment of their creation could they exist without him. But with God's withdrawal, they would immediately disappear as a rainbow in the clouds when the sun sets.[15]

More parries a number of Knorr's queries, claiming they are too speculative and that he is more interested in practical matters promoting a virtuous life:

> Though you fear that learned men will despise, hate, and ridicule these theories, you should be more concerned lest we violate in any way and diminish the honor of sacred and useful mysteries with superfluous and useless notions or conjectures. But we should measure all our speculations according to their usefulness either for strengthening faith in the Christian religion or for promoting a virtuous life. The whole of my philosophy has been directed to these two ends.[16]

In essence, while More's reply to Knorr reveals the similarity of their interests, it also presents in brief compass the major criticism he would later level against the Kabbalah as he became more familiar with it: it was simply too complex and speculative. But for the next few years More's curiosity and genuine interest in probing a new world of kabbalistic theory took the upper hand.

More's initially favorable response to van Helmont and the Kabbalah was a sign of his own relatively tolerant attitude, an attitude illustrated by his eclectic methodology. More described himself as "a fisher for Philosophers, desirous to draw them to or retain them in the Christian faith."[17] He was willing to consider diverse philosophical and religious ideas with a view to selecting those which best suited his ecumenical purpose. This attitude typified his approach to the Kabbalah. "I do not doubt," he wrote to Anne Conway, "but there is pretious gold in this Cabbalisticall rubbish, which the discerning eye will easily discover."[18] Commenting on Knorr's reference to him as a "Latitudinarian," More indicates both the conciliatory and propagandist purpose behind his tolerance:

> As for me, I never allowed myself to be drawn into any sect, being content with the name of an early Christian or, as you acknowledge of yourself, an

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[15] ibid.: "Primo hic mihi liceat notare, hanc vocem, emanare, non oportere trahi ad severum sensum ac Philosophicum sed Metaphorice debere intelligi (ne imaginatio rationi illudat) et significare tantummodo substantias omnes ita a Deo creari ut ne momento quidem temporis jam creatae absque eo possint subsistere, sed Deo sublato quod evanescerent statim, ut iris in nube exincto Sole."

[16] ibid.: ". . . Quo vero huiusmodi Theoremata vulgo hominum literatorum magis invisa fore & odiosa aut ridicula suspiceris, tanto magis cavendum est, ne superfluis & inutilibus notionibus vel conjectationibus mysteria tam sacra & utilia quovis modo violemus, eorumve honorem minuemus, sed speculationes omnes nostras mensuremus ex utilitate quam post se gerunt ut ad corroborandam fidem in rebus Relligionis Christianae aut ad vitae probitatem promovendum. Ad quae duo tota mea adhuc collimavit Philosophia."

[17] *The Apology of Dr. Henry More. . . Wherein is Contained as well a More General Account of the Manner and Scope of his Writings.*

[18] *CL*, p. 351.

> Evangelical. I am not a Latitudinarian in any other sense than that I have the widest affection for all men and I fervently desire good things not only for our Reformed but also for the Catholics, Jews, Turks, and even Pagans. Nevertheless, I censure and assail the errors of all these not without some vehemence of spirit and word, so that with these goads, having been awakened from sleep, they may open their eyes and learn the truth. Nay, the same ardor animates my pen against certain overly reverential [superstitiores] Cartesians who, indulging in ignorant and immoderate admiration for Descartes instead of truth and religion, cherish such things that are not only false but impossible and inimical to true piety.[19]

In truth, however, More's tolerant stance only applied to those doctrines which were, in his estimation, relatively unimportant, doctrines such as the pre-existence of the soul or the infinity of the world. On matters he considered essential, More was both adamant and passionate, as one can see from the six treatises he eventually wrote rejecting most aspects of the Kabbalah as dangerously atheistical.[20]

There is a less obvious, but no less important, reason for More's interest in the Kabbalah and Quakerism as well. Certain aspects of More's Neoplatonic orientation make his initial attraction to both entirely comprehensible. Elements of the ancient gnostic belief in the perfectibility of man and in universal salvation survive in both the Kabbalah and Quakerism. These same gnostic elements appear in the Neoplatonic philosophy that so attracted More as a Cambridge undergraduate.[21] More's Neoplatonism made him receptive to these ideas, but his commitment to Christian theology proved stronger in the end. As much as More tried to combine the two, the task was essentially impossible. He eventually rejected those aspects of Neoplatonic thought which greatly attracted him but which he came to recognize as incompatible with Christian theology.

More's initial reaction to the Kabbalah was favorable largely because his knowledge of genuine kabbalistic thought was negligible and based on second-hand and heavily Neoplatonized sources. As Brian Copenhaver has pointed out, More's concept of space incorporated the kabbalistic idea that

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[19] Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod-Guel 30.4 Extrav. Auftrag-Nr, f. 23: "Quantum vero ad me, ego nunquam passus sum in ullam sectam me absorberi: Christiam primaevi nomine contentus, vel quemadmodum Tu de te ipso profiteris, Evangelici. Nec Latitudinarius sum ullo alio sensu, quam quod latissimum habeo affectum erga omnes omnino homines bonaque animitus opto non solum Reformantis nostris, sed & Pontificiis, Judais, Turcis etiam ac Paganis. Quorum tamen omnium errores non sine aliqua animi sermonisque vehementia reprehendo & insector, ut his stimulis scilicet somno tandem expergefacti oculos aperiant & agnoscant veritatem. _____ [illegible] & idem animi ardor calamum etiam strinxit adversus superstitiores quosdam Cartesianos, qui plus indulgentes inscite cuidam & immodica Cartesii admirationis quam veritate & Relligioni, talia fovent, quae non solum falsa sunt, imo impossibilia, sed & verae pietate inimica."

[20] The idea that the Cambridge Platonists were tolerant is challenged by Ashcraft, "Latitudinarianism and Toleration: Historical Myth versus Political History." It is certainly true that More exhibits great intolerance to ideas that he thinks inimical to his brand of Christianity. See Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Dr. Henry More*. But there was another side to More, as well, that tried to understand other points of view and accommodate them.

[21] More's tutor, Robert Gell, believed in the perfectibility of the soul, and may well have influenced More.

place (*maqom*) is an attribute of God, an idea he discovered in Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy* (hardly a genuine kabbalistic text) and found useful in his refutation of Descartes.[22] Following his initial enthusiasm for Descartes, More became preoccupied with what he identified as the atheistic implications of Cartesian dualism, and he employed what little he knew about the Kabbalah to combat this dualism.[23] If only matter and not spirit was extended, as Descartes maintained, then in More's view spirit was non-existent. For in order to exist an entity had to be located in a physical place. More labeled those who rejected the notion that spirit was extended "nullibists," or "nowhereists," and argued that such a view inevitably fostered atheism.[24] By adopting the kabbalistic view that space was a divine attribute, More believed he had discovered an apt example of an entity that was extended though immaterial. In this instance the Kabbalah provided More with evidence to support his contention that spiritual substances were extended.

More's rejection of Cartesian dualism was part of his rejection of exclusively mechanical explanations in science. If all the events in the natural world could be explained in terms of matter in motion, divine Providence was meaningless and the way would be open, first, for materialism but, ultimately, for atheism. A major objective in all More's writings from the 1650s to the end of his life was to prove that spiritual forces were responsible for physical change.[25]

Brian Vickers has observed that the whole tenor of Renaissance Neoplatonism and occultism in general is "a progressive reification of the immaterial."[26] The elaborate series of emanations in the various Neoplatonic and Hermetic creation myths basically served to explain how the One became the many, or how spirit was gradually transformed to the point of approximating matter. Ficino's Neoplatonic magic, for example, was based on the assumption that the world spirit was material enough to be consumed, inhaled, or absorbed in various foods, drinks, perfumes, or sounds, each one of which possessed power to ennoble the spirit of a practicing Magus. As we have seen, Ficino defined the *spiritus mundi* as something of a hybrid between matter and spirit; consequently, it was a perfect bond between the two.

More admitted that there had been a time in his life when he became temporarily infatuated with "Marsilius Ficino, Plotinus. . . and Mercurius Trismegistus."[27] More's early poetry was clearly influenced by Ficino's

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[22] Copenhaver, "Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution: Henry More, Joseph Raphson, Isaac Newton and their Predecessors."

[23] Gabbey has shown that More's attitude towards Descartes was critical from the start and that consequently one cannot say that More rejected Cartesian philosophy after an initial infatuation ("Philosophia Cartesiana Triumphata").

[24] *The Divine Dialogues*, 1: Ar.

[25] This objective explains More's intense interest in witchcraft. See my article, "Henry More and Witchcraft."

[26] Vickers, "Analogy and Identity," p. 117.

[27] Ward, *Life*, p. 12.

Theologia Platonica.[28] One suspects, however, that More's infatuation was cut short by his realization that in the final analysis Neoplatonism and Christian theology were not compatible. Neoplatonic monism simply does not fit with the essentially dualistic view of matter and spirit inherent in orthodox Christianity. However unhappy More was with Cartesian dualism, he was unable to overcome it. As Anne Conway pointed out, he simply replaced it with something similar.[29] In her *Principles* she offers a perceptive analysis of the inconsistencies involved in More's concept of spirit. (More was always the first to speak of the acuity of Conway's intellect.[30]) If spirit possessed both motion and sense, as More believed, then body would be superfluous:

> But if they allege that body and spirit agree in certain attributes, such as extension, motion, and shape, with the result that spirit has extension and is able to reach from one place to another, move from one place to another, and also change itself into whatever shape it pleases, in such cases it agrees with the body and the body with it.[31]

Conway's critique of More was on the mark. Though admittedly more orthodox (and perhaps for that very reason), More was a less rigorous philosopher and less in fact of a Neoplatonist than his pupil. She took her own criticisms of More's philosophy to heart and followed van Helmont's lead in adopting a consistent, but hardly Christian, philosophy of spiritual monism.

However, aspects of monistic thinking continue to appear in More's writing, providing evidence of the deep influence Neoplatonism had in his intellectual development. As Patrides has pointed out, a hallmark of the Cambridge Platonists was their rejection of the Augustinian and Calvinist emphasis on man's depraved and fallen nature and the reassertion of the Renaissance theme of the dignity of man. The optimistic and inherently Pelagian outlook of the Cambridge Platonists was reflected in their preference for the writings of the Greek philosophers and Greek Church Fathers over those of Augustine and later churchmen. Patrides maintains that "The deification of man is one of the most thoroughly Greek ideas espoused by the Cambridge Platonists."[32] Plato believed that men had the capacity "to become like God."[33] Plotinus believed it possible for man to merge with the One and "to be God."[34] Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Athanasius accepted this thoroughly Greek idea.[35] Although refuted by Augustine and

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[28] Bullough, ed., *Philosophical Poems of Henry More*; Staudenbaur, "Galileo, Ficino, and Henry More's *Psychathanasia*,"; Jacob, "Henry More's *Psychodia Platonica* and its Relationship to Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*."

[29] Hutton, "Anne Conway critique d'Henry More: L'esprit et la matière."

[30] Ward, *Life*, p. 193.

[31] *Principles*, p. 49.

[32] Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 19.

[33] *Theatetus*, 176b.

[34] *Enneads*, I, ii, 6.

[35] "The Son of God was made man so that we might be made Gods" (Athanasius, *De Incertitudo*). Origen believed that Christ had assumed manhood so that "by fellowship with

again by Calvin, the idea of man's kinship with God and his consequent perfectibility kept reappearing in Christian writings, but always on the borders of heresy, if not well beyond. As a result of his reading of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophers, particularly Plotinus, More invested the orthodox Christian belief that man was made in God's image with the Platonic idea that man could become divine. More could not accept the inherent divinity of man as openly and completely as alchemists and Kabbalists because it so obviously clashed with the Christian doctrine of original sin. But there is enough evidence in More's writings to suggest his orthodoxy was not always in control. Take, for example, the following expostulation:

> How *lovely*, how *Magnificent* a State is the *Soul* of *Man* in when the *Life of God* inactuating her, shoots her along with himself through Heaven and Earth; makes her *Unite* with, and after a Sort feel herself animate, the whole World. . . . This is to become *Deiform*, to be thus suspended (not by imagination, but by Union of Life. . . joining Centers with God) by a sensible Touch to be held up from the clotty dark Personality of this compacted Body. Here is *Love*, here is *Freedom*, here is *Justice* and *Equity* in the *Super-essential Causes* of them. He that is here looks upon All things as One; and on himself, if he can then mind himself, as a part of the Whole.[36]

This passage appears in a treatise in which More attacks Vaughan as an enthusiast, a charge that Vaughan had previously leveled against More. More adopts a strange defense against Vaughan's accusation. First, he simply denies that he is an enthusiast: "Nor am I at all, Philalethes, Enthusiastical." But he then goes on to write one of the more enthusiastic passages on record, which appears remarkably similar to the ecstatic soliloquy delivered by Nous to Hermes Trismegistus previously quoted:[37]

> For God doth not ride me as a Horse, and guide me I know not wither myself; but converseth with me as a *Friend*: and speaks to me in such a *Dialect* as I understand fully, and can make others understand, that have not made Shipwrack of the Faculties that God hath given them, by *Superstition* or *Sensuality*. . . . for God hath permitted to me all these things; and I have it under the Broad Seal of Heaven. Who dare charge me? God doth acquit me. For He hath made me full lord of the Four elements; and hath constituted me Emperour of the World. I am in the *Fire of Choler*, and am not burn'd; in the Water of *Phelgm*, and am not drown'd; in the *Airy Sanguine*, and yet am not blown away with every blast of transient Pleasure, or vain doctrine of Men; I descend also into the sad *Earthly Melancholy* and yet am not buried from the sight of my God. I am, *Philalethes*, (though I dare say thou takest me for no bird of Paradise) *Incola Coeli in Terra*, an *Inhabitant of Paradise* and *Heaven* upon Earth—I sport with the Beast of the Earth; the Lion licks my Hand like a Spaniel; and the Serpent sleeps upon my Lap and stings me not. I play with the Fowls of Heaven; and the Birds of the air sit Singing on my Fist. All these things are true in a Sober Sense. And the *Dispensation* I live in, is more Happiness above all Measure, than if thou couldst call down the moon so near

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divinity human nature might become divine" (*Contra Celsus*). Cited in Patrides. Cf. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man. St. Gregory of Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition.*

[36] Ward, *Life*, pp. 89-90.

[37] See ch. 7.

> thee by thy *Magick* Charms that thou mayst kiss her, as she is said to have kiss'd *Endymion*; or couldst stop the course of the Sun; or which is all one, with one Stamp of thy foot stay the Motion of the Earth.[38]

This rhapsodic passage brings to mind the Hermetic vision of man as the microcosm with the power to comprehend the macrocosm because it lies within himself. It also suggests that More had absorbed the Platonic view that man has the capacity to become divine. In this connection it is interesting to note that one of the people who read the draft of Ward's life of More complained that not enough was said about More's mystical experiences and their contribution to his attainment of spiritual perfection: "why must we have no account or Journal of the Holy discipline of *Divine Wisdom* upon this Early Devoto; whereby he *became Perfect*, as the Author of Wisdom expresseth it, ch. 4. 13 *in a short time*?"[39]

Purification is a consistent theme in More's work. Staudenbaur has pointed out that when More discusses purification, he mixes together the essentially incompatible treatments of the subject in Christian and Neoplatonic thought. As More says, helpfully citing his sources while describing his spiritual crisis as a Cambridge undergraduate.

> It fell out truly very Happily for me, that I suffer'd so great a *Disappointment* in my *Studies*. For it made me seriously at last begin to think with my self; whether the *Knowledge* of things was really that *Supreme Felicity* of Man; or something *Greater* and *More Divine* was; Or supposing it to be so, whether it was to be acquired by such an *Eagerness* and *Intentness* in the *reading* of Authors, and *Contemplating* of things; or by the *Purging* of the *Mind* from all sorts of vices whatsoever; Especially having begun to read now the *Platonick* Writers, *Marsilius Ficinus*, *Plotinus* himself, *Mercurius Trismegistus*; and the *Mystical Divines*, among whom there was frequent mention made of the *Purification* of the *Soul*, and of the Purgative Course that is previous to the *illuminative*; as if the Person that expected to have his Mind *illuminated* of God, was to endeavour after the *Highest Purity*.[40]

For Christians purification is a moral and ethical matter, while for Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, and alchemists, purification is an essentially physical act. The physical nature of More's notion of purification is evident in the following passage. Here More describes regeneration in terms of the purification of the blood and spirits by means of the world spirit inhaled during prayer. Not all prayers, however, can effect such purification, but only

> such [prayers] as *deep Sighs* from the very bottom of the Soul do also accompany with the most *vehement Aspirations* after God and virtue. For by these Labours and passions we ventilate and purge the blood and Spirits, and draw in larger Draughts of the pure air or ether on them; by which we strengthen and increase the *Luciform Body*, (that which *Hierocles* calls also the

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[38] Ward, *Life*, pp. 89-90. Cf. Crocker, "Mysticism and Enthusiasm in Henry More."

[39] Ward, *Life*, preface. Lichtenstein argues that ecstasy and mystical experience eluded More. But passages like this suggest the contrary. See Lichtenstein, *Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist*, p. 14.

[40] Ward, *Life*, p. 12.

> *Spiritual* and *attenuate Vehicle*) and imbibe with them at length *God himself*, in a sort into our *Souls*.[41]

More outlined a "Philosophical Hypothesis touching the Mystery of Regeneration," an essentially physical process described by Ward as follows:

> He ever had a great Care, to keep in good Order what the *Platonists* call the *Luciform Vehicle* of the Soul; in which the Boniform *Faculty*, as they term it, resides. And here it will not be amiss to acquaint the Reader with some Peculiar *Maxims* of His upon this subject. He laid a great stress upon what he calls the *Divine Body*, as well as the *Divine Life* itself; and upon the *former* because of the *latter*: For he supposeth that it always *dwells* in it, and is no where fixable out of it; and that by how much any Person partakes more of *Righteousness* and Virtue, he hath also greater Measure of this *Divine Body*, or *Coelestial Matter*, within himself. Of this he particularly discurseth in the Beginning of his Fourth *Dialogue*. . . and tells us, of what great Moment it is; and that *by our sincere* Devotions, *and* Breathings towards God, and in Virtue of Our real Regeneration, *we imbibe both the* divine Life, *and the* Divine Body *at once*. And in a MS I have seen, he observes on this Head, *that there is a holy* Art of Life, *or certain Sacred Method of attaining unto great and Experimental* Praegustattions, of the Highest Happiness, that *our Nature is capable of*; and *that the* Degree of Happiness *and* Perfection *in the* Soul *arise, or ascend, according to the* Degree *of* Purity and Perfection *in that* Body *or* Matter *she is united with*: So that we are to endeavour *a Regress from the baser Affections of* the Earthly Body; *to make our* Blood *and* Spirits *of a more refined consistency; and to replenish our* Inward Man *with so much larger Draughts of* Aethereal or Coelestial *Matter*.[42]

In this passage there are echos of Ficino's mystical-magical practices for purifying the spirit, which More knew about.[43] There is something extremely material about the kind of spirit More describes here, and this explains why More has been accused of being a materialist.[44]

More's conscious effort at an early age to suppress his obvious interest in natural philosophy reflects his commitment to Platonic epistemology and to the concomitant conception of purification as a process of eradicating the grosser aspects of the body:

> But here openly to declare the Thing as it was; when this inordinate Desire after the Knowledge of things was thus lay'd in me, and I aspir'd after nothing but this sole *Purity* and *Simplicity* of *Mind*, there shone in upon me daily a greater Assurance than ever I could have expected, even of those things which before I had the greater Desire *to know*; Insomuch that within a few years, I was got into a most Joyous and Lucid State of Mind; and such plainly as is *ineffable*; though according to my custom I have endeavoured to express it.[45]

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[41] Ward, *Life*, p. 103.

[42] ibid., pp. 39-40.

[43] More places Ficino, Plotinus, and Hermes Trismegistus among "the Mystical Divines: among whom there was frequent mention of Purification of the Soul, and of the Purgative course that is previous to the Illuminative; as if the Person that expected to have his Mind illuminated to God, was to endeavour after the Highest Purity" ("Praefatio Generalissima" *Opera Omnia*, p. ix; quoted in Ward, *Life*, p. 12).

[44] Henry, "A Cambridge Platonist's Materialism. Henry More and the Concept of Soul."

[45] Ward, *Life*, p. 15.

More's enhanced spiritual state, produced by the regenerative processes he himself describes, was accompanied in turn by unusual physical manifestations: his urine had the "Flavour of Violets;" his breast and body "sent forth flowery and Aromatick Odours."[46] Such claims, which suggest the close association between body and spirit in More's thinking, together with his own enthusiastic statements, led people to accuse him of enthusiasm, a charge that Ward felt compelled to explain and refute.[47]

I am not suggesting that More was a Hermeticist or that he accepted perfectionist ideas, simply that aspects of his thought lean in this direction and may have made him more aware and critical of the doctrine when he met it head on. More's most passionate diatribes are directed at those who, in his estimation, misunderstood the doctrines he cherished. He attacked Thomas Vaughan for distorting true Platonism with "Preposterous and fortuitous imagination."[48] He attacked the Lurianic Kabbalah because it, too, went beyond the boundaries of the kind of Neoplatonized Christianity he deemed acceptable. More constantly tried to fit kabbalistic philosophy to the procrustean bed of his brand of Christian Neoplatonism. In the letters and treatises More sent to von Rosenroth as he was editing the *Kabbala denudata*, More repeatedly draws parallels between kabbalistic and Neoplatonic doctrines, only to have them rejected by von Rosenroth.[49]

Through van Helmont and Knorr, More was exposed for the first time to genuine kabbalistic thought. His earlier and enthusiastic book on the Kabbalah, the *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653), had been written in virtual ignorance of authentic kabbalistic texts. The two Jewish authorities More cites most frequently (and presumably the only ones he actually read) are Philo and Maimonides, neither of whom can be described as Kabbalists.[50] When More wrote his *Conjectura Cabbalistica* he had not read the Zohar, the book at the heart of kabbalistic thought and a fundamental text for all Kabbalists. In a letter to Anne Conway, More candidly admits that his "Cabbala" was the product of his own imagination:

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[46] Ward, *Life*, p. 147. See the Scolia to *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 58.

[47] "And if in high Warmeth, and Letting out of his Pen at this time, some Expressions fall from him that may seem to be over-adventurous and unwarrantable; or if he shall appear in some things to be even *Enthusiastical*, though against Fantasy and *Enthusiasm* it self He hath offer'd so good an *Account* thereof, and so sobler an *Apology*, in that Letter of *Mastix* before cited; that it will abundantly Satisfy the judicious and Ingenuous; and leave the thing (however he seem'd afterwards to neglect it himself) a Beauty and not a Blemish in his *Writings* and *Character*" (ibid., p. 51).

[48] *Observations upon anthroposophia Theomagica*, preface.

[49] For example, More argued repeatedly that the ten kabbalistic *sefirot* were essentially the three Neoplatonic Hypostases (*Opera Omnia*, II: 432).

[50] Although in his *Conjectura Cabbalistica* More does refer to "The Rabbines" (pp. 143, 147) and to "R. Abraham Ben Ezra" (p. 129), as well as to the Schools of Hillel and Samai" (p. 150), his knowledge of these sources was second-hand. As More says at one point, "Vatablus observes out of the Hebrew Doctors" (p. 113). Philo was of particular interest to More because of his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, his reconciliation of Platonism and Judaism, and his emphasis on ideas as causal factors. More's attraction to Maimonides lay in their similar emphasis on reason as an integral aspect of all religious experience, including revelation and prophecy.

> Though the Conceptions in the Cabbala be most part my own, yet I do what I can in my Defense to gette Godfathers all along to these births of my own braine, and so to lessen the odium of these inventions by alleging the Authority of Ancient Philosophers and Fathers, and therefore the Defense is longer than other wise it had needed to have been.[51]

The "Godfathers" More found are none other than his favorite Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Neoplatonists. Like most Christian interpreters of the Kabbalah, More used the term to designate a philosophy which he considered particularly enlightening.[52] For More this was his ingenious analysis of the first three chapters of Genesis as an up-to-date scientific text based on the principles of Descartes. More's kabbalistic work had, therefore, the apologetic purpose of integrating Platonism and Judaism within a Christian and scientific framework. More subscribed to the view of Renaissance Neoplatonists and Christian Kabbalists that Moses had been the mentor of Pythagoras and Plato. Platonic philosophy therefore had an impeccable pedigree; whatever deviations appeared in it resulted from the fact that Plato and Pythagoras had "mingled their own fooleries" with the pure source of Mosaic philosophy.[53]

More's early kabbalistic work represents a phase of his thought in which he still had high hopes for the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and felt that Christianity could absorb pagan and Jewish influences. As he became older his views narrowed. He recognized greater difficulty in harmonizing science and religion, and he began to suspect that too much philosophizing could undermine essential Christian beliefs. Through his association with van Helmont and correspondence with von Rosenroth, he came into contact with genuine kabbalistic thought and his early enthusiasm faded. His mind revolted against such elaborate doctrine. How, he asked, in a treatise von Rosenroth included in the *Kabbala denudata*, can the Kabbalah pretend to explain difficult passages in Scripture when it is itself so abstruse? Allegories and enigmas are not explained by further allegories and further enigmas.[54] After carefully reading the treatises included in the *Kabbala denudata*, More concluded that the Kabbalah had almost nothing to offer Christianity because it was overly complex and made faith difficult when it should be simple and, more importantly, because its philosophy was flagrantly materialistic, pantheistic and, consequently, tantamount to atheism.

More expressed these criticisms in six short treatises included in the *Kabbala denudata*.[55] The most lively of these treatises is the fourth one

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[51] *CL*, p. 83.

[52] Nicolson, "Milton and the Cabbala."

[53] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 83.

[54] *KD* I, 2: 179.

[55] These six treatises were published both in the *Kabbala denudata* and later in More's Latin edition of his collected works.

1. *Aditus tentatus rationem reddendi Nominum & Ordinis decem Sephirotharum in duabus Tabulis Cabbalisticis, ex Scriptura, Platonismo, Rationeque libera* (*KD* I, 2: 14-27).

2. *Quaestiones et Considerationes paucae brevesque in Tractatum primum libri Druschim.* (*KD* I, 2: 62-72).

entitled, *The Fundamentals of Philosophy, or the Cabbala of the Eagle, the Boy and the Bee.* This short critique of the Kabbalah begins dryly enough with a list of sixteen axioms that More attributes to Kabbalists.[56] All of these involve the idea that matter and spirit are interchangeable, an idea accepted, as we have seen, by Luria, van Helmont, and Conway. The depth of More's distaste for the Kabbalah only appears towards the end of the treatise, when he describes the nightmare that provided him with the bizarre title of his work. He dreamt that he was in a strange room looking out a window facing east. He observed an eagle flying toward him and when he opened the window, the bird flew in. The room turned into a garden and More found himself sitting under a tree. The bird perched tamely on his hand like a hawk and allowed More to stroke him. More observed that bird seemed to consist solely of dry bones without any muscle, and he was surprised by the strange shape of the bird's beak, flatter than a duck's and bent at an acute angle. To More's amazement the bird began to speak. He then turned suddenly into a small boy with dirty blue and white hair and a dirty tunic in matching colors. Hoping to discover whether the boy was a good or bad spirit, More asked him if he believed in one God. The boy's negative reply, given with a condescending smile, proved too much for More, who descended from the philosophical heights, and, to use his own words, "ordered Satan to be gone and assailed the boy with repeated kicks."[57] The boy immediately transformed himself into a bee, but More continued to kick as the bee buzzed around his shins. More did not think that a "trivial matter" could have reduced him to such a frenzied state. When he began to analyze his dream, he realized that the only thing that might have upset him so thoroughly was the Kabbalah, precisely because of its materialism and pantheism.[58]

By the time More finished his last kabbalistic critique in 1675 he had read Spinoza and was profoundly disturbed by the pantheistic implications of both Spinoza's philosophy and the Kabbalah. In fact, More criticizes both philosophies in almost identical terms. His criticisms led him to the conclusion that there was a clear and unbridgeable difference between matter and God, or matter and spirit, though not of the kind proposed by Descartes. He could not accept van Helmont's and Conway's contention that everything was essentially spirit and that matter was simply spirit in a debased or "congealed" state. He emphasizes the absurdities to which this doctrine leads. If God had not created the world out of matter that was totally distinct from his essence, then the world would somehow have emanated from God and be God. God would then be divisible, which in More's philosophy was

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3. *Ulterior Disquisitio* (*KD* I, 2: 173-224).
4. *Visionis Ezechieliticae sive Mercavae Expoositio* (*KD* I: 2:225-273).
5. *Catechismus Cabbalisticus sive Mercavaeus* (*KD* I, 2: 2 74-292.
6. *Fundamenta Philosophae sive Cabbalae Aeto-Paedo-Melissaeae* (*KD* I, 2: 293-312).

[56] This list is apparently what confused Hutin into thinking that More accepted the Kabbalah

[57] *Fundamenta Philosophiae, sive Cabbale Aeto-Paedo Melissaeae* (*KD* I, 2: 298-300).

[58] For a fuller discussion of this nightmare, see Coudert, "A Cambridge Platonist's Cabbalist Nightmare."

utterly impossible since divisibility was *the* property that distinguished matter from spirit. More was shocked and appalled by the pantheistic doctrines he discovered in the Kabbalah: "no one can fail to see how monstrously discordant the idea is that God can become stones, dung, a little louse, a toad, a devil, etc."[59] If everything was essentially spirit, as van Helmont and Conway argued, everything would feel and it would be impossible to carry out the simplest tasks: "Since all matter is a mass of sleeping souls, it ought to be considered how much pain axes, saws, and files cause these creatures. That a part of God can sink down into this sleep and pain, how ridiculous and horrible."[60] More had leveled the same criticism in similar words against Spinoza.[61] As we have seen, van Helmont and Conway tried to protect themselves against the pantheistic implications of their monistic philosophy, but More did not accept their defense.

More picked out other examples of "gross," "crass," and essentially pantheistic thought in the Kabbalah. He took exception, for example, to the kabbalistic description of the unfolding of the ten *sefirot*:

> The three ways in which the emanations of the Sefirot of the Cabbalists are said to be made, namely, together, one above the other, joined in a heap, or in three distinct columns, or, finally, disposed as circles within circles seems to me altogether gross and crass, as if the divine powers were not spirit but body.[62]

The mythologizing talents of Lurianic Kabbalists held no charm for Henry More.

More's attack on materialism was nothing new. Some of his most vigorous, as well as his earliest, poetry and prose had been directed against materialist philosophies.[63] More's increasingly outspoken criticisms of Cartesian philosophy was based on his growing awareness of its materialist implications.[64] His great interest at the end of his life in substantiating the existence of witches, ghosts, and poltergeists was simply part of his larger campaign to discredit materialism.

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[59] *Fundamenta Philosophiae*, (*KD* I, 2: 298): " Deum fieri Lapidem, Stercus, Pediculum, Busonem, Diabolum, &. immane quantùm absonum esse, neminem non videre."

[60] ibid., p. 297: "Cum omnis Materia congeries sit Animarum consopitatrum, considerandum esse, quantos dolores ipsis creaturae sint Asciae, Serrae, Limae, &. Partem verò DEI in hunc stuporem & dolorem delabi posse, quàm ridiculum aut horridum!"

[61] "Whence if there is no substance which is God, or a Being entirely and absolutely perfect, but only matter, as *Spinoza* would have it, then this *Spinozan* God is like a Goose among Geese, as Ass among Asses, a Toad among Toads, a Louse among Lice, a Tortoise among Tortoises, a Man among Men, a Fool among Fools, a Maniac among Maniacs, a *Spinoza* in *Spinoza*" (*Demonstrationis duarum Propositium. . .*, *Opera Omnia*, p. 627).

[62] *Quaestiones & Consderationes* (*KD*, I, 2: 64): "Tres illi modi quibus Cabbalistae Sephirotharum Emanationes fieri contendunt, sive cunctae aliae super alias componantur in unam struem, sive in tres distinctas Columnas, seu denique in tot orbes alios intra alios disponanatur, universi mihi videntur nimis pingvi atque crassi, tanquam si Divinae Potentiae non essent, aut Spiritus, sed corpora."

[63] The entire purpose of his *Psychodia* was to combat materialism.

[64] In his preface to *An Explication of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660), More says that he wrote his *Antidote against Atheism* (1653) because he realized that mechanistic materialism fostered atheism.

For all his criticisms, More did not totally reject the Kabbalah. As his disturbing nightmare shows, he believed that there were traces of divine wisdom represented by the "bones" of the eagle, who was, after all, a royal—though in this instance a decrepit—bird. He also thought the Kabbalah might prove of some use in converting the Jews. But, as we might expect from his methodology, More was far more interested in fitting kabbalistic ideas into a Neoplatonic-Christian framework than in understanding them in any detail on their own terms.

In the end, More reverted to his own brand of Kabbalah and to the Pythagorean hermeneutic he had employed in the *Conjectura Cabbalistica.* He simply rejected all those kabbalistic doctrines he disliked on the grounds that they were not a genuine part of the ancient Kabbalah received by Moses and passed down to Pythagoras. More attributed the corruptions and distortions in the Lurianic Kabbalah to the taint of Aristotelianism and to the fact that later Jewish Kabbalists were "ignorant of prophetic style." He believed that the Jews had lost the old, genuine Mosaic Kabbalah in the repeated and various disasters befalling them throughout their history. Because Pythagoras had lived four to five centuries before these disasters had distorted the Mosaic Kabbalah, More was convinced that he and his followers provided a better source for the rediscovery of original kabbalistic doctrine than later Jewish writers.

The tendency in Neoplatonic thought to reify the immaterial and to materialize the spiritual, which appears at times in More's own writings, was thus forcefully rejected by More in his criticisms of the Kabbalah. Here he became an outspoken dualist and only accepted those elements of Neoplatonic philosophy that were compatible with the Christian concept of creation *ex nihilo* and with the Christian belief in the transcendence of God. In his mind there was a fundamental and essentially moral difference between matter and spirit. Matter was inherently "vile," "low," "mean," and "crass" (all words used by More), while spirit was the opposite. This was the basis for More's ambivalent attitude towards empiricism. The empirical investigation of nature was not only a low-level activity because it dealt with material things, it was also deceptive and misleading. Empiricism resulted in the kind of false philosophy More excoriated in his criticisms of the Kabbalah. More argued that Kabbalists had ended up with a totally erroneous view of God, matter, and the creation because they had confused two incompatible methodologies, the rational and the empirical. In More's criticism of what he takes to be this confused kabbalistic epistemology, one can observe his Platonic bias:

> To speak briefly of the methods involved in these two kinds of philosophizing. The first arises from a certain perception and intellectual acuteness; the second from a dull imagination and bodily sensation. . . . To the first source are referred all the innate ideas in the human intellect, or the accurate notions of things, which no external sense is able to perceive, such as [the idea] of a triangle, of a circle, or a tetrahedron, or of a most perfect being, and the like. Included in this group are purely intellectual axioms, or immediate truths of

> logic, ethics, mathematics. . . . the human mind perceives truth by means of its sagacity alone, without the benefit of the corporeal imagination or of the external senses, which are not able to perceive eternity, nor necessity, nor infinity, nor finally, the notion of God. . . .
>
> As for the other source [of philosophizing], one may attribute the following concepts to it: that a substance is perceived in length and breadth, that all corporeal matter is extended (with its contrary, that spirit is nowhere); that nothing can be made without preexisting material, or, what amounts to the same thing, that nothing can be created; that the movement of one body is caused by another; that everything that occurs in the world results from mechanical causes alone; that bodies are held together by the union of hooked atoms; and an infinite number of similar ideas, found especially among the followers of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, among others. When I read these ideas as a young man, I thought immediately afterwards that I had heard some old satyr or ape philosophizing, in as much as all things were deduced from the external senses and the crass imagination.[65]

More's commitment to the superiority of Platonic epistemology is clear: reasoning from sense impressions is worthy of brute beasts, not men; the true apprehension of reality can only come from the innate ideas lodged in the mind.

The gulf that existed between matter and the mind, or matter and spirit, in More's philosophy paralleled the gulf between man and God. Although More had a far higher opinion of human nature than Calvin, he ultimately rejected the kind of perfectionism characteristic of alchemy, the Lurianic Kabbalah, and radical sectarianism.

It is significant that More's most enthusiastic period was in the 1640s and 1650s, a time when enthusiasm was widespread and the doctrine of perfectionism an inherent aspect of the prevalent millenarianism accompanying the political confusion and unrest. "Why may we not have an Heaven here and Heaven hereafter too?" asked Gerrard Winstanley. Although a "Leveler"

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[65] *Fundamenta Philosophiae*, (KD, I, 1: 302-4): "Ut breviter igitur dicam. Duplex illa Philosopandi ratio haec est. Una quidem *ex sensus quodam* ac *sagacitate Intellectuali*, altera verò ex crassa Imaginatione, sensuque corporeo. Philosophatio verò ex his suobus Principiis, nihil aliud est nisi quaedam circa deducendas ex utrolibet conclusiones communis Rationis Exercitatio. Ad priorem fontem referendae sunt omnes *innata* Intellectus huani *Ideae*, notionesve rerum accuratae, quales nullus externus sensus percipere potest, ut trianguli, circuli, Tetrahedri, Entis summè perfecti & similium. Etiam Axiomata *Noematicè sive immediatè* vera, *Logica*, *Ethica*, *Mathematica*, ut quod alicui rei convenit quantenus talis, id nequaquam convenire potest suo contrario: Quod tibi fieri non vis alteri ne feceris. Quae aequalia sunt uni tertio, aequalia sunt inter se. Quam veritatem non solum in quantitate corporea, sed in omnibus omnino rebus Menis humanae sagacitas intellectualis primo intuitu deprehendit. Item, Quiquid est, finitum est aut infinitum. Necesse est aut Materiam aeternam esse, aut aeternum esse DEUM. Haec mens humana certò percipit vera esse, suâ solius innixa sagacitate, non beneficio Imaginationis corporeae, sensuumve externorum, qui nec aeternitatem, nec necessitatem, nec Infinitatem possunt percipere, ne nitionem denique DEI. . . .

Ad alterum fontem reducenda sunt ista. Substantiam & corpus aequè latè patere. Omne extensum esse corporeum (cum suo consectario, Spiritus nusquam esse.) Nihil fieri posse nisi ex praejacenti materia, vel quod idem est, Nihil posse creari Omne corupus motum ab alio corpore moveri. Omnia Mundi Phaenomena rationibus purè Mechanicis osse explicari. Cohaerentiam corporum, atomorum hamatarum unione contineri, & id genus alia ferè infinita praesertim apud *Democriti & Epicuri* Sectatores, apud *Lucretium* prae caeteris, quem cum admodum adolescens evolverem, putabam profecto subinde me Satyrum quempiam Simiumve senem è sylvis Philsophantem audire, adeo omnia ex solo sensu externo crassaque Imaginatione decuebantur."

when he asked this question (and hence an extremist by definition), Winstanley echoed the views of many of his more moderate contemporaries, millenarians in their own right, who concluded that the millennium was a prize to be won by their own efforts.[66] As the ultimate expression of cosmic democracy, Winstanley's pantheism was even more revolutionary: "The whole creation of Fire, Water, Earth and Aire and all the varieties of bodies made up thereof, is the cloathing of God."[67] What is interesting in the context of this study is the similarity of Winstanley's pantheism to that of van Helmont and Conway. Even more pertinent is the similarity between the radicalism of extremists like the Ranters and the Levelers and that of the Quakers. The Quakers' opposition to landlords, their refusal to pay tithes and to take oaths, and their contempt for social conventions (exemplified in the famous "Hat Controversy") enhanced their radical reputation and, with it, the distrust they inspired. The result was a concerted drive against them, which began in 1656 when Cromwell and Monk purged the Quakers in the New Model Army.[68]

Geoffrey Nuttall has asked why the Puritans, who shared so many common ideas and attitudes with the Quakers, turned so strongly against them in the late 1650s. He answers his own question with both a political and a psychological explanation. During a period when religious conformity was synonymous with political loyalty and political loyalty rested on the taking of oaths, Quakers were bound to be perceived as disloyal. The religious question was therefore part of larger political issues and as the political situation changed, so did Puritan attitudes. By the late 1650s and on into the 1670s, as stability and the restoration of order became the primary goals in both political and religious life, the second Civil War generation turned against the enthusiasm of the Civil War period. Puritans rejected their own enthusiastic past, which had so much in common with the Quakers, in much the same way that Quakers were later to reject theirs.

Winthrop Hudson suggests another reason for the growing fissures between religious groups with initially similar outlooks and beliefs. He argues that two essentially incompatible impulses lay behind the emphasis on mystical religion in the Puritan Commonwealth. As these incompatible impulses revealed themselves with increasing clarity, division and dissention inevitably followed. The first impulse was rooted in an emphasis on practical piety and on direct communion with God. The inward, spiritual nature of religious experience was stressed above the letter. A second and entirely different source of mysticism lay in the attempt to recreate, or rediscover, the original, primitive Christian community. This attempt led individuals on spiritual odysseys that often took them from one group to another in search of the true Church. Such a pilgrimage could lead to disillusionment with all

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[66] For an overall view of the way in which millenarianism contributed to the idea of scientific progress, see Webster, *The Great Instauration*.

[67] Winstanley, *Works*, p. 451.

[68] Reay, "Quakerism and Society," p. 155.

institutional forms of worship and to complete surrender to the spirit within. According to Hudson, these two impulses attracted different people. The first was more congenial to those like Henry More, who accepted established religious institutions (and the clerics who staffed them) but hoped to revitalize them from within. The second tradition was potentially far more radical, anticlerical, and even antinomian. The Quakers, van Helmont, and Conway fit into this group. Hudson correlates the two traditions with the existing class structure: "The first [tradition] was largely a middle class movement, expressing middle class ideals; the second was what we would now term proletarian in outlook and ideology and involved a strong element of social protest."[69] The problem with this economic and class analysis is that it does not fit the Quakers. According to Reay, while there were a substantial number of poor Quakers, hearth-tax returns reveal that the majority belonged to the relatively comfortable middle section of the community.[70] In seventeenth century England religion was an extremely powerful force and not solely a function of economics.

Both Nuttall's and Hudson's analyses help to explain Henry More's growing conservatism. As a result of the sectarianism and extremism of the Civil War period, More came to appreciate the dangers of enthusiasm.[71] More's emphasis in later years on morality and the adherence to traditional values reveals his distrust of the esoteric, arcane knowledge to which he was so clearly drawn by temperament. The last of More's writings reveal a kind of anti-intellectualism at odds with his earlier work. His conservatism may also have been stimulated, at least in part, by the extreme skepticism and fideistic arguments of Catholic apologists, who took great pleasure in emphasizing exactly where the rejection of tradition had gotten Protestants. More appears to have concluded that if no absolute moral standards could be established by reason, the best course would be to conform to existing laws and conventions.[72]

In the end More could not accept the Kabbalah nor could he accept Quakerism; but the time and energy he expended trying to understand both is a measure of his humane and relatively tolerant outlook. More's tolerance was certainly limited by modern standards, restricted as it was to an individual's private conscience. Even then it did not extend to atheists, Jews, professed enthusiasts,[73] and even Presbyterians,[74] all of whom could not be trusted because by More's tendentious definition they were not guided by

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[69] Hudson, "Mystical Religion in the Puritan Commonwealth."

[70] Reay, "The Social Origins of Early Quakers."

[71] On More's reaction to enthusiasm, see Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Dr. Henry More*.

[72] Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*. Popkin has described More as an "incurable skeptic," which would make his increasingly conservatism even more understandable. I believe, however, that More's skepticism was not incurable, merely expedient. For both views see our respective articles in Hutton, ed., *Of Mysticism and Mechanism: Tercentenary Studies of Henry More, 1614-1687*. Cf. Gabbey, "A disease incurable": Scepticism and the Cambridge Platonists."

[73] *The Grand Mystery of Godliness*, p. 368.

[74] *The Apology of Dr. Henry More*, pp. 513-4.

reason.[75] But, in an age when intolerance was clearly still the rule, More was more tolerant than many of his contemporaries. More's tolerance was a function of his faith in reason. Reason would, he believed, eventually lead reasonable men to accept the kind of reasonable religion he supported.[76] Such a belief appears naive, tautological, and self-serving now, but More's emphasis on the reasonableness of *his* Christianity did have the effect of downplaying the role of revelation, a tendency that eventually led to the non-dogmatic Christianity of late seventeenth century deists such as Toland, Collins, and Tindal. Tolerance was only possible once the concept of unique, unquestionable truth of revelation had been abandoned. More took a tentative step in that direction.

More's eventual rejection of the Kabbalah and Quakerism was one aspect of his emphasis on reason in religious matters. He faulted both Quakers and Kabbalists for their lack of reason, for their excessive enthusiasm, and for their resulting sectarian spirit. Instead of encouraging charity and concord, he accused both groups of pretending to have some special insight into divine wisdom, an insight that made them superior and unique. More found this abhorrent. As he says in the annotations he made to Glanvil's *Lux Orientalis*:

> But because a fancy has taken a man in the head, that he knows greater Arcana than others, or has a more orthodox belief in things not necessary to salvation than others have, for him to affect to make others Proselytes to his Opinion, and to wear his badge of wisdom, as of an extraordinary Master in matters of Theory, is a mere vanity of spirit, a ridiculous piece of pride and levity, and unbeseeming either a sober. . . man or a good Christian. But upon such pretenses to gather a Sect, or set up a church or Independent Congregation, is intolerable Faction and Schism, nor can ever bear a great and strict examination according to the measures of the truest Morals and Politicks.[77]

In a sense one could say that More's tolerance led him to reject the Kabbalah and Quakerism on the grounds that both were too specialized and esoteric in their theology, too uncompromising in their claim to special truth, and ultimately too intolerant of alternative views. An even more basic reason for his rejection of both, however, lay in his political and social conservatism and Calvinist training. In the final analysis More was unable to accept the optimistic, radical Pelagianism inherent in the occult philosophies to which he was otherwise so obviously drawn.

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[75] *The Grand Mystery of Godliness*, p. 369.

[76] More believed that Christian magistrates should build schools and foster "Humane learning" with the aim of promoting a more rational understanding of scripture (*The Grand Mystery of Godliness*, p. 369).

[77] *Annotations upon the two foregoing Treatises, Lux Orientalis. . . and The Discourse of Truth*, pp. 147-8.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE QUAKERS' REJECTION OF THE KABBALAH

It is impossible to give an exact date for van Helmont's break with the Quakers, both from their point of view and from his. The seeds for the separation had been sown during the years between 1675 and 1679, when van Helmont, Anne Conway and George Keith collaborated on the *Two Hundred Queries. . . Concerning the Revolution of Humane Souls.* Although it had been written by the time of Anne Conway's death in 1679, it remained unpublished for five years. Even then it lay like a time bomb, exploding only some ten years later. The ideas expressed in the *Two Hundred Queries* were attributed to both Keith and van Helmont, and the ranks of Quakers united to condemn and renounce them.

It is not surprising that the Quakers rejected the *Two Hundred Queries.* While some of the early Quakers, and even George Fox himself, were influenced by the kind of occult thinking so congenial to van Helmont, this became less and less true. As time passed the Society attracted new members who were more interested in living their faith than speculating about it. As Croese wrote in his history of the Quakers:

> Their Doctrines were short and plain. They contain'd few necessary Articles of Faith; none of them related to the Contemplation and speculation of abstruse and difficult things, which are more curious than useful to piety and goodness.[1]

The doctrine of the revolution of souls was both speculative and highly complex; it found support in the writings of ancient Rabbis and philosophers, but not in the hearts of the Quakers.

The *Two Hundred Queries* was not the single cause of the controversy leading to Keith's public and van Helmont's tacit disownment by the Quakers. Although the Quakers never did accept van Helmont's and Keith's theory of transmigration, they would never have publicly repudiated the doctrine had Keith not been the proud, argumentative, over-bearing man he was. Through his insistent and aggressive demands for Quaker reform and reorganization, Keith antagonized the main body of Quakers in both America and England. In criticizing Keith's attitude and behavior, his opponents did not fail to see his association with van Helmont as another mark against him.

The controversy involving Keith, van Helmont, and their joint effort, the *Two Hundred Queries*, is referred to by all Quaker historians as the "Keithian Controversy," and its most intense phase occurred in London from 1694 to 1695. The prologue to the controversy, however, may be traced back to the days when Ragley was the meeting place for More, Keith, van Helmont,

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[1] Croese, *History of the Quakers*, I: 30.

and Conway. At that time Keith had been the ardent Quaker, who so impressed van Helmont and Conway to the chagrin of Henry More. He had boldly answered More's criticisms of his book *Immediate Revelation,* saying to Barclay that he found nothing substantial in More's arguments.[2] More, however, had a much greater impact on Keith than Keith himself realized. From 1680 onwards Keith's position changed, and he became increasingly conservative in his theology. His biographers have not failed to note the similarity between Keith's views in these later years and those Henry More had pressed upon him.[3]

Even before More's death Keith came to agree with him that a Christian must believe in the specifically Christian concepts deriving from Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Within the next twenty years, Keith moved even closer to More's conservative position. In 1684 he published a book entitled *Divine and Immediate Revelation and Inspiration Continued in the True Church,* in which he maintained that knowledge of God could not rely solely on the "light within." Keith argued that the Bible had to be read by all Christians in order for them to learn "the more special Heads and Doctrines," such as election, justification, and regeneration.[4]

Keith's growing conservatism was encouraged by his emigration to America in 1685 as Surveyor-General of East Jersey. Once there, he became deeply worried about the future of Quakerism. He saw with clarity and foresight that religious education simply could not be left to the "light within." For the first generation of Quakers, brought up on theology, the Quakers' rejection of dogma proved a fruitful liberation. This was not the case for the following generations, nor for the Quakers in America, who were for the most part hard-working farmers with little or no formal instruction. These men did not have the same solid basis upon which to build their faith. Keith, the highly intelligent and carefully educated exponent of Quakerism, was horrified by the unsophisticated manners and beliefs of the American Quakers. During his years there, he tried to organize the Quakers and formulate their beliefs. He traveled from meeting to meeting, preaching and teaching what he considered to be the basic essentials of Quakerism.

By 1690 Keith's conviction that religious education must become an essential part of Quakerism prompted him to write *A Plain Short Catechism for Children and Youth.* Although this was directed at children, Keith did not hesitate to say that every Quaker would benefit from reading it. He emphasized the importance of believing in the historical existence of Christ and says little about the "light within." Like all catechisms, his book is in the form of questions with "yea" and "nay" answers. One of the most telling "yeas" comes after the question "Doth not the Scripture declare many things

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[2] *Reliquae Barclaianae*, p. x: "but as for his paper, I see no difficulties in it at all, to weaken me in anything I have written to him."

[3] See Kirby, *George Keith,* pp. 7-8, 20-21, 29, 34 and 152. Bailey claims that the circle at Ragley was important in pushing the Quakers into a more orthodox position. While this is true of Keith, it can hardly be said of van Helmont and Conway.

[4] Keith, *Divine Immediate Revelation and Inspiration*, preface and *passim.*

of great weight, respecting the way of mens eternal Salvation, that are not inwardly revealed to all men?"[5] Keith also took the hitherto very un-Quaker position that the Eucharist was a vital experience, not simply when spiritually interpreted, as most Quakers believed, but when physically consumed.[6]

At the same time Keith wrote his *Catechism,* he offered a draft proposal for Quaker organization and discipline. He advocated that all those entering a Quaker meeting make a confession of faith, which could be accepted or rejected by the members present. He urged the election of Elders and Deacons and maintained that people unsure of their beliefs should remain silent. These proposals were rejected by the Yearly Meeting as "downright Popery."[7]

Keith suffered from the problem besetting many gifted and energetic men in a democratic group. He was neither tolerant nor patient and could not support the ignorance he saw around him. He believed it was vital to the future of Quakerism for his views to be immediately accepted. He tried to force his position on the American Quakers, sincerely thinking it was for their own good. In so doing he lost sight of the concept of growth and individualism that marked Quakerism at its best, a concept so well expressed by another Quaker, Isaac Penington:

> The great work of the minister of Christ is to keep the conscience open to Christ; and to preserve men from receiving any truths of Christ as from them, further than the Spirit leads, guides and persuades them. For persons are exceeding prone to receive things as truths, from those whom they have a high opinion of; and to imitate their practices; and so hurt their own growth and endanger their souls. For if I receive a truth before the Lord by His Spirit make it manifest to me, I lose my guide and follow both the counsel of the flesh, which is exceeding greedy of receiving truths and running into religious practices without the Spirit.[8]

Much of what Keith advocated during his years in America was shared by other Quakers, and many of his suggestions were, in fact, later adopted. As William J. Frost has said in his introduction to a reprint of the major tracts dealing with the Keithian controversy, "Not until Friends had forgotten George Keith were they willing to endorse his reforms."[9] There is a suggestion that van Helmont shared Keith's opinion that the Quakers lacked sufficient organization and means of instructing their youth. Philip Jakob Spener, the German Pietist and one of van Helmont's many friends, makes this point in a letter he wrote in 1690:

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[5] Keith, *A Plain Short Catechism for Children and Youth, That may be Serviceable to such Others who need to be instructed in the First Principles and Grounds of the Christian Revelation*, p. 7.

[6] ibid.

[7] Kirby, *Keith*, pp. 55-56.

[8] Penington, *The Works of the Long-Mournful and Sorely-Distressed Isaac Penington*, p. 239.

[9] Frost, *The Keithian Controversy in Early Pennsylvania*, p. xx.

> I know also from several persons, who are not accustomed to judge hastily from prejudice, that Friends have not sufficiently organised themselves into a firm enough union to prevent differences among themselves. As I also know that the renowned van Helmont, who even to this day unites with them, has regretted on several occasions and has expressed the opinion that other arrangements were needed and has especially endeavoured to point out to them that, since they do not instruct the youth in human knowledge but merely leave them to learn as best they can from the operation of the Spirit that they do not bring them up as Godly and learned Christians but merely as ignorant and uneducated men and women.[10]

Keith's personality worked against his reforms. He tried to advance his views too quickly, and his arrogant and argumentative manner estranged him personally from many of the Quakers who might, or did, agree with him intellectually. His behavior eventually brought him into open conflict with the majority of American Quakers. In 1691 Keith was charged with heresy by William Stockdale and Thomas Fitzwater.[11] These men accused Keith of preaching two Christs, a spiritual Christ within and the historical Christ, who died at Jerusalem.[12] In essence, this charge amounted to a severe criticism of Keith's growing conservatism; for these men felt that Keith was ignoring the Quaker belief in the "inner light" and turning Quakerism into merely another orthodox form of Protestantism.[13] In his usual aggressive way, Keith countered the charge against himself with one of heresy against his two accusers, saying that they did not believe in the historical Christ and therefore could not be Christians.[14]

During the course of this dispute, Keith was charged for the first time with believing in the transmigration of souls and with having written a substantial part of the *Two Hundred Queries*. Keith's views on transmigration were never the main point at issue; they were brought up simply as a way to cast suspicion on his views as a whole—particularly the view stemming from his increasing conservatism, that the Christ who died at Jerusalem was a more important part of the Christian religion than the Christ of the "inner light." Keith was well aware of the way his opponents used the doctrine of transmigration against him:

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[10] P.J. Spener, *Letzte Theologische Bedencken.*, I: 304.

[11] Kirby, *Keith*, p. 61ff.

[12] It is interesting to note that one of the customary charges in Jewish "cherems" (excommunications) is that the offender's teachings or actions led to "two Torahs."

[13] *The Minute Book of the Philadelphia Monthly Meetings*, 1682-1714, p. 74: "Whereas at a monthly meeting the 29th. day of the 11th. month 1691/2 Thomas Fitzwater charged George Keith with denying the sufficiency of the Light, which George Keith denying, Thomas Fitzwater insisted that he could prove the same, and being examined concerning his proof, several friends present stood up, and said they heard the said George say it, and after the matter had been thoroughly heard the Evidences as aforesaid gave in their testimony to the Truth of his disowning the Light to be sufficient without something else, whose names were Thomas Pritchard, William Harwood, Benjamin Chambers, Francis Rawles, William Southerby and others and therefore friends saw no cause to give Judgment against Thomas Fitzwater for that particular, but the said Thomas left the matter very readily to the meeting, and Condemned the Rash spirit that he spoke those words in, although the charge itself was true."

[14] Kirby, *Keith*, pp. 63ff.

> If such a necessity of Faith in the Crucified Man, Jesus Christ, for Eternal Salvation, be allowed or granted, the Revolution of Many Souls must be granted; but the last is absurd, and therefore is the first absurd also.[15]

In the year after Keith was charged with believing in transmigration, he published a defensive pamphlet in which one can detect his ambivalent attitude towards the theory. The pamphlet was called *Truth and Innocency Defended Against Calumny and Defamation In a late Report spread abroad concerning the Revolution of Human Souls, with a further Clearing of the Truth by a plain Explication of my Sence,* etc. In this Keith denies that he was the author of the *Two Hundred Queries,* or that he believes everything in it:

> I do say, after the best Recollection of my Memory that I can make, after so many Years past, I do not remember that I said. . . I was the Authour of that Book, and I know not how he [Stockdale?] can justly think it, considering these very Circumstances he alledgeth, and some other Circumstances whereof he cannot be ignorant, unless he hath forgotten the whole; for I told him, that divers Persons were concerned in the Book, called, *The Two Hundred Queries,* and after what manner. Besides, another Person hath in Print divers Years ago owned that Book; why then should he charge me with that which another hath owned? The most he can justly alledge, is, *That I said a considerable part of the Book, which I had from another, I put into Writing;* which will not prove me to be the Authour; for I oft put into writing other mens words, even such as are Adversaries. . . . And I say yet further, as no man living can prove me to be the Author of that Book, so I had not the least hand in the Printing it; for it was printed altogether without my consent and Approbation, and the Defaults (whether in the Transcribing, or in the Printing of it,) are so many, that it hath quite altered the sense of the Queries in many places, and made other of them Non-sensical; and there are things in it for which I am no wise accountable, and which I never did own, or do own to be mine.[16]

Keith's description of the way in which the *Two Hundred Queries* was written is supported to some extent by van Helmont, although van Helmont does ascribe to Keith a greater share in the authorship than Keith presumably would have wished. In the preface to his *Paradoxal Discourses,* van Helmont describes the genesis of the *Two Hundred Queries* as follows:

> . . . which Treatise upon the desire of a Person of Quality [presumably Anne Conway] some years ago, I did dictate to a friend [Keith] who afterwards (retaining the sence) put it in another method, he also adding to it several things of his own, which was afterwards published by me, without his name above a year ago by Robert Kettlewel.

There is some justification for Keith's assertion that the sense of the *Two Hundred Queries* had been considerably altered by the time it was published. Keith had, in all probability, written the treatise down in English. Van Helmont must have translated or redictated it in Dutch because when it was

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[15] Keith, *An Appendix Containing the True Copy of a Latine Letter writ by G.K., and sent by him to Gerard Croes* (hereafter *Appendix to Gerard Croes*), p. 12.

[16] ibid., pp. 3-4.

finally published in English, it is described as having been translated from the Dutch into the English language.[17]

However much Keith tried to disassociate himself from the *Two Hundred Queries*, he never unequivocally repudiated the doctrine of transmigration. He makes the same kind of distinction between faith and philosophy Henry More and Joseph Glanvil made in the case of pre-existence and claims that the theory of transmigration belongs to the latter. While errors in faith, such as denying the historical reality of Christ's death and crucifixion, constitute "vile and abominable Heresie" and inevitably lead to eternal damnation, errors in philosophy have no such grave consequences. They are simply mistaken opinions and do not affect an individual's chance of salvation. For this reason, Keith argues, somewhat torturously to be sure, that it is perfectly legitimate to believe in transmigration. It enabled him to accept the historical aspects of Christianity without denying its universal relevance and appeal:

> . . . and if any either do not or cannot see, but that the necessity of the Faith and Gospel of Christ crucified and raised etc. in order to perfect salvation, must needs infer the Necessity of the *Doctrine of Revolutions*, at least after some sort, but not as vulgarly understood, I do say, it is more tollerable to admit the consequent, than to deny the Antecedent; for the consequent, in respect to the Antecedent, is but a small moment (whether true or false; I meddle not at present to determine) and if an Error, it but of an inferiour degree, and is rather an Error in that call'd Philosophy, then in Divinity, and is rather a mistake in opinion, grounded upon a pretence of Reason, than any Error in the Faith, unless it can be demonstrated that the said Doctrine doth expressly, and without any far-fetcht consequences contradict some Article of the Christian Faith, the which remote and far-fetch't Consequences are not allowable among vulgar Christians, however sincere, because there may be a Fallacy, or at least, a great uncertainty in them; but an Error in the Antecedent, to wit that the Gospel and Faith or our Lord Jesus Christ (as he was crucified for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and is our Elder Brother and high priest in Heaven without us, making Intercession for us) is not necessary to be preached to the Nations for Remission of Sin, and eternal Salvation, to finish and perfect it, is a most vile and abominable Heresie, most worthily to be detested by all sincere *Christians*, and the Asserters and Abettors of it most worthily to be judged No *Christians*, yea, worse than honest Heathens, who have never had Christ preached unto them.[18]

The accusations launched against Keith by Stockdale and Fitzwater during 1691 were debated and reiterated in the following monthly and yearly meetings. During this time Keith attracted a small, but vocal, group of supporters, who were known as "Christian Quakers." The schism between Keith's group and the other Quakers did not become irreparable until there was literally a pitched battle in one of the Philadelphia Meeting Houses. This is worth describing because it shows how bitter the controversy had become and how disreputable the affair was for the Quakers as a whole—a con-

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[17] Van Helmont, *Two Hundred Queries*, preface: "About two years since, the Two Hundred Queries were translated into the English tongue beyond the seas by a Lover and Searcher after hidden Truth." This probably refers to Benjamin Furly.

[18] Keith, *Truth and Innocency*, p. 9.

sequence the London Quakers were quick to realize. Keith's supporters secretly built a new platform in the Quaker Meeting House, opposite the old gallery, so that Keith would have an elevated place from which to speak against his opponents. The ensuing meeting started as an undignified shouting match and eventually turned into a fist-fight. The magistrates were called, and to prevent utter chaos, they decided to demolish Keith's platform with axes. But while they were still at work, Keith's followers had managed to raze the other gallery to the ground.[19]

Keith's handling of the controversy in America made compromise impossible. He hoped he would have more success with the Quakers in London and decided to leave America and plead his case before them. Keith did have a legitimate grievance against the American Quakers. Their education was minimal and their beliefs often shaky, and it cannot be said that either side in the controversy acted with decorum. However, the way he pressed his case antagonized the majority of the Quakers to the point that they refused to see anything of value in his suggestions.

Keith did not change his position after the battle in the Meeting House, if anything he grew more conservative. In 1694 his book *Truth Advanced in the Correction of Many Gross and Hurtfull Errors* appeared in New York. Keith again stated his conviction that divine revelation comes only with the help of outward means. He even went so far as to stress predestination and say that while the sacraments were not essential, they had merit as "badges." Keith, the Quaker, was slipping back into the Calvinism of his youth.

Keith left America and landed in England late in 1693. His arrival marked the beginning of two years of quarreling among the English Quakers, which only ended when Keith was officially expelled from the Society. It is not a simple matter to follow the English phase of the controversy. The English Quakers were so concerned with appearing united in the eyes of their detractors that they tried to minimize the doctrinal issues involved, attributing their conflict with Keith to his personality and behavior. It is even harder to assess the charges that went back and forth about Keith's adherence to the theory of transmigration or to discover the influence this doctrine had on other Quakers. Three years after Keith left America the American Quaker Caleb Pusey wrote an account of the schism, in which he attributed it to Keith's desire to make American Quakers accept the doctrine of transmigration.[20] There is evidence to show that van Helmont's views, particularly those expressed in the *Two Hundred Queries*, did attract a number of Quaker adherents. But in striving for recognition and respectability, the Quakers' only wish was to disassociate themselves from views so suspect and susceptible to ridicule.

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[19] Kirby, *Keith*, p. 94.

[20] *A Modest Account from Pensylvania of the Principal Differences in point of Doctrine between George Keith and those of the People called Quakers*, reprinted in Frost, *The Keithian Controversy*, document 18, pp. 304-67. See Frost's article, "Unlikely Controversialists: Caleb Pusey and George Keith."

Even before Keith put his case officially before them, the English Quakers reacted to the dispute in America by publishing a pamphlet they hoped would both reconcile the contending parties and show their critics the reasonableness of Quaker beliefs. This pamphlet was written by George Whitehead and entitled *The Christian Doctrine and Society of the People called Quakers Cleared from the Reproach of the late Division of a few in some part of America, as not being justly chargeable upon the Body of the said People there or elsewhere.* It is a moderate document, which, while it stresses the concept of the "light within," reiterates a belief in the historical Christ. As for the doctrine of transmigration, Whitehead unconditionally dismisses it with particular reference to the *Two Hundred Queries*:

> Touching the Opinion of the Revolution or Transmigration of *Humane Souls,* or their passing out of one Body into another, etc. as 'tis deem'd originally to have sprung from Heathen and receiv'd among Jews and some others by Traditions, and said to be the Opinion of our *Empedocles, Pythagoras* and *Egyptians,* and partly of *Julian* the Apostate. . . We are not concerned in any such notion, but (as a People) wholly clear of it. We deem it neither necessary to Faith, nor safe to receive or defend, as either held by those Heathen *Egyptians* or *Jews* aforesaid, nor as 'tis insinuated in a Late Pamphlet of *Two Hundred Queries Concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls,* supposing *twelve Revolutions or twelve distinct Intervals of Life to every Man, as being twelve several times born into the World for each one to live* (or consumate) *the space of 1,000 years on Earth.* Though such opinion of such Revolution appears not to be a point in present Controversy in the Book aforesaid (or in Pensilvania) nor maintained as any Divine opening, Revelation or necessary Article of Faith, but rather Evaded from being *Publically controverted,* yet in as much as there appears some ground of suspicion in the case, and as it seems to be favoured implicitely by some: therefore that we as a People may not be suspected about it, we sincerely declare our clearness from the said opinion, as really esteeming it not safe to propagate or maintain, or trouble Peoples Heads or Minds with it. . . and we are the less concerned about the aforesaid Queries and Doctrine because we find not any known person or persons of credible Authority that will adventure to assert that opinion, either as divinely Revealed or opened, or as necessary to be believed or received as an Article of Faith, or that will undertake to demonstrate how many times or Intervals of life they themselves have liv'd on Earth and what transactions or remarkable passages (or things good or bad), they have done or passed through in those their supposed past Intervals or Life.[21]

This pamphlet marks the first time that the Quakers came out publicly against van Helmont's theory of the revolution of souls.

The Quakers did not alter the position stated in this pamphlet. They tried to reason with Keith and come to some understanding; but in the end Keith was prey to his own personality, just as he had been in America. His colleagues deplored the fact that he had so aggressively published his side of the controversy. In the Yearly Meeting of 1694 a Quaker from Somerset reproached Keith for the harm his acrimonious books had done to the Quaker cause:

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[21] *The Christian Doctrine and Society of the People called Quakers,* pp. 15-16.

> Friends are greatly dissatisfied with the printed books because of the Effects that have happened by Geo: Keith's books relating to the differences at Pensilvania. . . by bringing Reproach on Truth, and opening the Mouths of our Adversaries.[22]

The Quakers had good reason to be dissatisfied with Keith. The controversy was grist to the mill of Quaker opponents, and if one observer, who describes himself as a "Moderate Church-man" is to be believed, the debacle with the Society became the talk of London:

> Who in this populous City hath heard nothing [of the controversy] must likewise have been Banished from Humane Society. It hath been not only the Discourse of Porters and Carmen over a pot of Ale, and Sparks and Beau's over a Glass of Wine; but also the Grave Citizen over a dish of Coffee, hath mixt his Observations upon State Affairs, with his Reflections upon the *Quakers* Differences. Nay, moreover the Revered Clergy of the Church of England. . . have been sometimes pleased to take notice of them in the Pulpit.[23]

In the end the Quakers found no alternative but to disown Keith. The outcome of the "Keithian Controversy" was in a sense perverse; for Keith, though hardly in the manner he would have wished, had accomplished his objective. The Quakers did become more conservative in terms of doctrine and organization; but their increased conservatism offered no shelter to the doctrine of transmigration.

The Keithian controversy was not merely a minor incident in the history of the Quakers. Frost maintains that it had profound ramifications not only for the Quakers but for the history of Pennsylvania and, indeed, American colonial history:

> The early history of Pennsylvania is replete with turmoil caused by settlers feuding with each other, ignoring royal officials, defying local authority, and belittling even William Penn. The colony never became the harmonious Holy Experiment envisaged by the proprietor, and the most bitter struggle—which threatened to tear apart the foundations of the new society—started among supposedly peace-loving Quakers. The Keithian controversy, beginning in late 1691, convulsed the colonies of West Jersey and Pennsylvania for over a decade, almost cost William Penn his charter, and, by leading to the foundation of Anglican and Baptist churches, helped to ensure religious diversity. Friends, constituting a majority of the population, dominated the government, and established the character of the settlements scattered along the Delaware River. Without an understanding of the impact of the Keithian controversy among Quakers, much of the early history of Pennsylvania and West Jersey will remain obscure.[24]

The statement in Whitehead's pamphlet that the doctrine of revolution seemed "to be favoured implicitely by some," undoubtedly refers to Keith and his followers in America. It may also have referred to some of the

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[22] London, Friends' House, MS for Yearly Meeting of 1694, p. 35.

[23] W.C., *Mr. George Keith at Turners Hall in Philpot Lane, London, in 1696, Contradicting Mr. Geo. Keith at the Tolbooth of Aberdeen, in 1668 in Fundamental Points of the Christian Faith*, p. 2.

[24] Frost, *The Keithian Controversy*, preface, i.

English Quakers as well. There were people in England who had earned the name "Helmontians"; and from the pains the Quakers took to disassociate themselves from van Helmont's views, it is likely "Helmontians" were numbered among them.

The Helmontians are described and soundly criticized in a book published in 1694 by J.H. (or John Hall, as listed in the British Library Catalogue), of whom nothing certain is known. The book is entitled *An Answer to some Queries propos'd by W.C. or, A Refutation of Helmont's Pernicious Error (that every Man is often Born, and hath Twelve Ages or Tryals allow'd him in the world by GOD) warmly Contended for In, and about Lambourn in Wiltshire.* The author of this book made a mistake; Lambourn is in Berkshire, not in Wiltshire, and this fact encourages interesting speculation about these so-called Helmontians.[25]

In Berkshire, particularly in and about Reading, there had been a controversy among the Quakers that had started at least ten years before J.H.'s book was published. The controversy originally began over the question of Quaker organization, and it resulted in the establishment of two distinct Quaker Meetings. Later, however, this controversy became confused to some extent with the Keithian Controversy, and a Keithian Meeting was set up in Reading in addition to the two other Meetings.[26] Those who attended this Meeting earned the name of "Keithians" for themselves, as Keith himself both admits and deplores.[27] Perhaps it was among these supporters of Keith that the "Helmontians" were to be found. As we have seen, Keith argued for a strong belief in the historical aspects of Christianity, and one way of escaping from the difficulties this position necessarily imposed on all non-Christians was to believe in the theory of the revolution of souls. Croese himself suggests as much in his history of the Quakers when he says that the "Keithians" avidly accepted all of Keith's views, including transmigration:

> Wherefore *Keith*, although he a good while smothered in silence, the opinions which he had long entertain'd, of the Transmigration of souls after Death; of the Last Judgment, and state of the Deceased, and end of the World, as being unsafe, and less acceptable to be disclosed; yet he could not so contain himself, but that now and then he gave an incling in his Discourses, of what his inward conceptions of these things were; and sometimes he was not able to forbear betraying in his words, what his true sense of those things was, and what he principally aim'd at in them; whence it came to pass, that those that lov'd

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[25] At the time I completed my doctorate on van Helmont in 1972, I was unable to find a copy of William Clarke's original pamphlet or even identify him with certainty. It was not until 1979 when the fifth volume of Edmund de Beer's edition of *The Correspondence of John Locke* was published that both the author and his text, which I had presumed lost, came to light. The implications of finding this text among John Locke's papers is discussed in the following chapter.

[26] This controversy was known as the Wilkinson-Story controversy. See Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, pp. 290-323. There is an unpublished bibliography of books relating to this controversy and its relationship to the Keithian Controversy in London, Friends' House.

[27] Keith, *An Appendix to Gerard Croes*, p. 1.

> *Keith*, and favour'd his Doctrine, greedily entertain'd these Principles. And yet for the most part, those that were the greatest followers of his Doctrine and Admirers of his Skill and parts (whom Keith indeed, for his own Credit sake, either found or made thorough pac'd in his Principles) embrac'd these Notions so heartily, that they relyed more upon his Authority and Precepts, than their own Judgment, and thought it enough to say, that he knew and said so, and so, and that with them, was Demonstration. And so his Exact and Nice and subtle Judgment, in these matters, was a subterfuge to cover their Ignorance.[28]

In the preface of his book, J.H. suggests that he is writing for one faction against another. He might conceivably have been writing for the Quakers against the "Keithians" and "Helmontians" within their Society:

> Why these Papers, which before attended you in Manuscript, now come in your hands in a more publick way, is chiefly due to the threatenings of our Inquirer's Friends, who upon hearing them Read, declar'd, *That they would see that they should be Printed:* This it seems they thought an Advantage, and you see I am so fair an Adversary as to give it them. You will readily observe that not only the Style, but the whole Contexture is negligent: and I freely own that I have endeavour's to be Fine in neither; For no body that knows the Persons I write for, or those I write Against, or the *Trifling Opinion* I am to refute, can believe there is need of any accuracy on this Occasion.[29]

In J.H.'s book van Helmont appears as the pariah of orthodox Christians. It is not hard to imagine what a dim view the Quakers would have taken of one of their colleagues accused of accepting such misguided and unorthodox views. Although J.H. apologizes for his book and for the haste in which it was written, he does point out some of the fundamental difficulties involved in van Helmont's theory. He had not, however, familiarized himself fully with it because some of his criticisms reveal a lack of understanding on his part rather than fundamental failings in the theory itself.

In the first part of his treatise, J.H. discusses the Scriptural passages quoted by W.C. to support transmigration. As we shall see more clearly in the next chapter, W.C. was one William Clarke, a friend of both van Helmont and John Locke. From these quotations one can see how closely Clarke followed van Helmont, using the same Scriptures cited in the *Two Hundred Queries.* Clarke even copied the form of van Helmont's and Keith's book, presenting his ideas as queries. J.H. devotes the following two sections of his book to showing how incompatible the theory of revolution is with both reason and the Christian religion.

After quoting each of Clarke's eight queries, J.H. gives a simpler alternative explanation with the intention of disproving and ridiculing the theory of transmigration. The first query shows the kind of Biblical passage van Helmont and those who accepted his ideas quoted to support transmigration: "*How shall we understand that Place of Scripture which saith,* the same measure you mete, the same shall be measured or mete to you again?[30] For

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[28] Croese, *History of the Quakers,* pp. 165-166.
[29] J.H., *Queries,* preface.
[30] ibid., pp. 1-2.

Clarke and the "Helmontians" this could only mean that a man who had inflicted hurt on another in one life must be born again to suffer the same hurt on his own person. J.H. cannot accept this: "None besides these *Helmontians*," he says, "did ever think of a Revolution, upon Reading these words in the Bible."[31] He interprets the passage simply to mean that Christ will punish men on the day of Judgment in a way which precisely fits their former sins.

J.H. criticizes the other queries in much the same way, offering simpler and more orthodox interpretations of the passages cited by Clarke. He also argues that transmigration is not even able to provide a satisfactory solution to many of the problems for which it was intended. As an example he cites Clarke's fourth query:

> *What may be the meaning of these Words of Christ in* Mat. 23. 35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the Earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of *Zacharias* Son of *Barachias*, whom ye slew between the Temple and Altar?[32]

Clarke interpreted this to mean that the men whom Christ addressed had actually lived in those earlier times and had participated in the murder of Abel and Zacharias. Had they not, he feels that God's justice would be called into doubt; for God would have punished the children for sins committed by their ancestors four thousand years earlier.

J.H. replies that this interpretation is impossible because the theory of revolution could not apply in this case for two reasons. First, since there were only four people existing at the time of Abel's murder, not all the men Christ had addressed could been on earth to share in Abel's murder. Second, the doctrine of revolution granted men only one thousand years in which to complete their twelve revolutions, and Abel's murder had occurred some four thousand years before Christ made his address. J.H. dismisses this particular argument for transmigration on a triumphal note:

> What a stand then we are at! By the *Helmontian* Doctrine, unless the Murderer of *Abel* be Born again, to have the same Measure meted to him, the Justice and Truth of God cannot be salv'd; and yet you see 'tis beyond the Power of this Expedient called a Revolution, to bring him down low enough to suffer with the Jews for it: So that hereby instead of defending the Dispensations of Providence, which they pretend to aim at, they expose it, by making it liable to all those Absurdities and Contradictions this Doctrine doth run them into.[33]

J.H.'s triumph here is a false one. The theory of revolution included the kabbalistic notion that the souls of every human being were present in Adam and his descendants. Thus all Abel's descendants would have shared in Abel's crime. Also, although the total amount of time an individual would actually be living in a body was one thousand years, there were times between lives. The complete cycle of twelve revolutions would extend to four

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[31] J.H., *Queries*, pp. 3-4.
[32] ibid., p. 7.
[33] ibid., p. 11.

thousand years. Van Helmont's theory of revolution was too complex for even the sophisticated mind of J.H. to grasp wholly; it is therefore little wonder that the Quakers considered it confusing and dangerous for their Society as a whole.

J.H. ends this part of his treatise by saying that Scripture offers no support to the theory of revolution: "These *Helmontians*, you see, are able to lay no Foundation for their Opinion in Scripture."[34] He proceeds to investigate whether the idea has any basis in reason. His most telling criticism in this section of his book rest on four points. First, since the theory of revolution ordains retribution in kind for every sin committed, God would seem to encourage evil. What one man committed voluntarily would of divine necessity be committed by another man as retribution, and the cycle of wickedness would be unending.[35] Second, if men had no memory of their former lives, reincarnation would serve no purpose.[36] Third, it is impossible to understand the part the body plays in the theory of revolution. Scripture argues against the belief that a man could take a new body because it speaks of a single resurrection. Reason and philosophy argue against the theory that an immaterial soul in the womb could attract the material elements of its former body, an idea which van Helmont and Keith had suggested in the *Two Hundred Queries*.[37] Fourth, J.H. argues that if van Helmont's thesis was true, men and women would beget their own ancestors:

> They tell us that this same Person that is now born did live perhaps before in the World divers times: at this rate 'twill fall out that *a man may beget his own Grand-Father and Grand-Mother*, which is one of the most ridiculous Paradoxes in the World. Let me explain my self in the instance of *Adam* and *Eve*; They after their first Death could be born of none but their *Grand-Children*, and if they were born of them, 'twill unavoidably follow, that these Grand-Children begot the very same Persons that begot their *Father* and *Mother*. . . . Hence too must follow, that, our *First Parents* were the mediate causes of themselves, that they were Born and Created too, that they were Polluted with original Sin, and yet liv'd in a state of Innocence. That Adam was in Paradise, was Tempted, did Fall, that he *knew Eve his Wife*, and yet he knew her not, but was born long after all these things were done. If riddle and Banter can recommend any Doctrine to the World, I know none that deserves better Esteem than this.[38]

This may have been a common objection to the doctrine because in *Seder Olam*, van Helmont (or whoever actually wrote the book) tries to make it clear that no one could be is own Grandfather, by enlisting the doctrine of *ibbur*:

> But such souls as do amend, the Mystick Writers say, do quickly revolve, in order to their perfect Resitution; so that the Soul of the deceased Father may

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[34] J.H., *Queries*, p. 17.
[35] ibid., p. 20.
[36] ibid., p. 22.
[37] J.H., *Queries*, pp. 25-29; *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 106ff.
[38] J.H., *Queries*, pp. 30-31.

> revolve in his Grand-child, (which is only but Historically related but not Dogmatically asserted) yett not so, that the father is the Grand-Child, for that would be great Confusion; but that as they say, the Soul of the Deceased Grand-father doth revolve, to cohabit and live together with the Soul of the Grand-Child in the same Body, even as the Soul of the Grand-Child did live together and cohabit with the Soul of the Grand-father in the Grand-father's Body, out of whose Loins he did at last proceed; accoring to which Hypothesis, it may be understood, how the Souls of Er and Onan, who died in the Land of Canaan, yet went with their Brethren into Egypt, making in all, together with Er and Onan, but 70 Souls, as plainly appeareth from Gen. 46. 12, 27. It being granted that they revolved in Pharez and Zerah, their younger Brethren, who had also their own proper distinct Souls; all which were great distinct Roots of their respective Families.[39]

J.H. makes one other criticism of the theory of revolution, a criticism consistently leveled against attempts to alter the traditional concept of hell. Without continual emphasis on the horrific aspects of eternal damnation, he was certain that the masses would strip themselves of the thin veneer of civilization and plummet into most fearful wickedness.[40] With this dangerous prospect in mind, J.H. ends his book by blaming the Toleration Act of 1689 for the scope it allowed to men with foolish and dangerous opinions:

> *Toleration* hath lately brought forth Three unshapely Sons at Birth, the *New Jerusalem Man,* the *Barker* and *Revolutioner*: But of the three, the last is the *weakest* Brother, as having only instead of Reason, a hard Forehead where with to defend himself.[41]

J.H.'s book makes it certain that there was a group of people who accepted van Helmont's views on the revolution of souls as explained in the *Two Hundred Queries.* It is impossible to know for certain if these "Helmontians" were connected with the Quakers, or with the group of "Keithians" appearing in Berkshire after Keith's return from America. But the close alliance in Quaker minds between Keith's conservative attitude towards the historical existence of Christ and his acceptance of transmigration suggests that the two groups may have overlapped. Isaac Penington points out the complementary nature of the two views in a book he wrote against Keith entitled *The People Called Quakers Cleared by Geo. Keith, From the False Doctrines Charged Upon them by G. Keith, and his Self-Contradictions laid open in the ensuing citations out of his books:*

> Thus G. Keith, one while asserting, that Faith in Christ, as he Died, Rose again, Ascended, etc. is indispensably necessary to all, another while, that men have been without it. . . put me in mind of an *Observation* a Friend made, *viz* that strange Notion of the *Revolution* of *Humane Souls*; which make it more than possible, that they shall have opportunity, one time or other, before the end of the world of *Hearing* this *Faith* and *Doctrine* Preached, and may receive it, though now they Die without it. But this point (adds he) must be tenderly

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[39] *Seder Olam*, p. 227.
[40] J.H., *Queries*, pp. 35-36.
[41] ibid., p. 36.

> touched now, because few are ripe for it; yet how far he (G.K.) hath countenanced it, is known to many.[42]

Sewel makes the same point in his *History of the Quakers*. He feels that Keith could only have changed from his original position that "saving" faith is more important than historical knowledge because he accepted van Helmont's doctrine of transmigration. Sewel marvels that Keith now accuses Quakers of unorthodoxy for stressing the "inner light," as he himself once did, and thinks Keith is doing this to gain recognition and reward in the Anglican Church:

> to charge the *Quakers with* Inorthodoxy, he himself launch'd out into an Heterodox Sentiment: For it was believed, that for maintaining this Position, *That the Historical Knowledge of Christ's Sufferings, Death, Resurrection,* etc. *was absolutely necessary for salvation,* he had no other Ground than the Twelve pretended Transmigrations or Transitions of Man's Soul from one Body into another; because the ignorant souls from hence seemed to get opportunity of being informed before the End of the World concerning the Death and Resurrection of our Saviour. Who would have imagined before that this same G. Keith should have accused the *Quakers* of Inorthodoxy in Point of Doctrine, which he had so often so effectually defended.[43]

The connection between Keith's apostasy from Quakerism and his interest in the theory of revolution is made in much stronger terms by John Whiting, an English Quaker, who wrote fiercely against Keith after Keith left the Quakers to become an Anglican minister. Whiting was convinced Keith believed in the revolution of souls and had written a great part of the *Two Hundred Queries,* which indeed he had. He accuses Keith of deceit in trying to dissociate himself from the book and says he owns a manuscript in Keith's handwriting which expresses similar ideas.[44] He recollects sarcastically that Keith had once criticized George Fox for theorizing about the human soul while he himself pretends to much more detailed knowledge.[45] Whiting goes on to condemn Keith's involvement with the Kabbalah as a whole. He ridicules the parallel Keith drew between the kabbalistic concept of *Adam Kadmon* and the Quaker concept of "Christ within" and advises him to keep his "Heathen Stories" to himself:

> But for this Heathenish or Jewish story of one *Adam Kadmon,* or First Man, and his several sorts of Flesh, which Thou thought'st *would help the Quakers to defend their Notion of Christ's Spiritual Flesh and Blood,* we reject it as a *Fable*; thinks't thou that we need such *Romances* to *Defend* or *Explain* our *Doctrine of Christ Within,* and the *Mystery of his Spiritual Body, the Flesh and Blood of Christ which came down from Heaven, on which the Saints feed, and are thereby nourished unto Eternal Life,* when the Scriptures are so full of it. Nay, George, thou may'st keep thy Heathen Stories to thyself (seeing thou art of much for *Heathenism* now) and needs't no doubt that we will Glory in any

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[42] Penington, *The People Called Quakers Cleared,* p. 31.

[43] Sewel, *History of the Quakers,* p. 639.

[44] Whiting, *Truth the Strongest of all: or, and Apostate further convicted, and Truth Defended,* p. 53.

[45] ibid.

> such Discoveries, the *Scriptures* are sufficient for us in the case, if not for thee.[46]

Gerard Croese also has interesting things to say about transmigration and the relation between Keith and van Helmont. He claims that Keith fully accepted the doctrine, although, as we have seen, he did not see it as an essential element of Christian faith but as a matter of philosophical preference. Croese provides an abbreviated version of van Helmont's relationship with Conway, Keith, and the Quakers and suggests van Helmont left the Quakers on his own initiative because they found fault with his theory of transmigration:

> There was yet another Tenet which *Keith* was not adverse to, but he was unwilling to obtrude it upon any, for that those of that Society did not desire it should be receiv'd or entertain'd, for their common Principle; it was that of perpetuity of Souls, and of their Transmigration and variation through several bodies; which proceeded at first from *Empedocles, Pythagoras*, and *Plato*; and was afterwards variously trimm'd and furbish'd about some hundred years ago, by those pratling *Jewish* Masters, call'd *Rabbins*, who not only tell but write when awake, whatever they have dreamed upon that subject while asleep; particularly *R. Titshakus Lorensis,* in a tractate wrote in Hebrew; and in these days is revived by *Baron van Helmont,* who hath deck'd it with all the necessary ornaments fit to procure it Reception; an Authour famous for the splendour of his Nobility, and his insatiable desires after knowledge and Learning, which he accounted the most comely and laudable Enjoyments he could be Master of; who because he lives well and has not where upon, is deem'd by his friends to have found out the philosophers stone. This man living in *England* at the time conversing among the *Quakers* as one of their Society had occasion frequently to converse with a Noble Countess, that was a great admirer of knowledge and Learning, and to reason with her out of the Book of *Plato*, concerning this Platonical Doctrine, and come that length with her, that both he and she embrac'd the same opinion for a truth; and because *Keith* was oftimes present at their Conferences, they bring him in also to take share in the same opinion. Which being made known to the Quakers, Helmont, who was a stiff Defender of his own Opinions, which they look'd upon, some of them, as Dangerous innovations; others, as foolish Errors, and Distracted Notions, became suspected and hated by them; upon which he bid farewell to them, and all their Society, proceeding not only to Vindicate his Opinion, but because he thought it yet nude and unpolish'd to refine and adorn the same, instructing himself again and again out of the *Jewish* writings of what might be serviceable to his Design.[47]

Returning to the subject of Keith, Croese claims that there were a small number of Quakers who accepted the doctrine of transmigration. He also says—and he was probably writing some time in 1693 to 1694—that the Quakers are soon to expel any members subscribing to Helmontian ideas:

> But I return to Keith. I am firmly perswaded that Keith receives, and entertains these Positions, if not all, yet at least the chiefest and most material of them; though he would not discover his Mind, in these Points, unto any, save those that are his Sectarians and Trustees, or that seem a little wiser than the rest. But he is not the only Favourite of these Doctrines; there be others among them that

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[46] Whiting, *Truth the Strongest of all*, p. 48.
[47] Croese, *History of the Quakers*, II: 37-40.

> are so fond of them as he, though very few; so that they are far from being universally received by all the Society, Nay, the *Quakers* shall not long tolerate any Abettors of such Principles to continue of their Society, if it be true, what I have oftimes heard from some of their principal Members.[48]

When Croese mentions those "others" among the Quakers who are fond of van Helmont's theory, He is conceivably referring to that group of "Helmontians" so criticized by J.H. in his pamphlet of the previous year.

When the Quakers finally disowned Keith at the Yearly Meeting on May 25, 1695, they were careful to say that their action was caused by Keith's aggressive manner and his refusal to withdraw his intemperate charges against the Quakers in America, and not by any controversy over doctrine.[49] The Quakers were only partially justified in taking this position. There were basic differences of opinion between Keith and the Quakers about organization, education, and belief. In order to defend themselves against Keith's charges, the Quakers found themselves accepting many of his ideas. What Keith might have accomplished with sweet reason, he accomplished through vituperative debate and at the expense of his expulsion from their Society. The Keithian Controversy forced the Quakers to define their views on a number of issues. Van Helmont's theory of the revolution of souls was not the least of these.

The Quakers passed through a process of evolution common to many religious societies. From their beginnings as a loosely-defined group of men and women held together more by what they disliked in other religions than by what they positively affirmed as their own, they evolved into a sect with their own creeds and beliefs. This very progress from a negative to a positive stand lost them many of their early adherents. Van Helmont was only one of these; what he had accepted in general; he was unable to accept as absolute. Another Quaker who was similarly affected was Benjamin Furly, a close friend of van Helmont and for many years the leading Quaker in Rotterdam.[50] Furly's friendship with van Helmont and the part this played in his estrangement from the Quakers is discussed in the following chapter.

The Quakers had never been oblivious to the complex character and thought of their illustrious convert. The letter Barclay had written to van Helmont in 1676 warned van Helmont against his restless search for knowledge and natural exuberance. The Quakers undoubtedly hoped that in time van Helmont would grow away from the Kabbalah as he grew in knowledge of Quakerism. But van Helmont could not still his wandering thoughts as Barclay had wished, particularly as they applied to the Lurianic Kabbalah. Five years after Barclay's letter, van Helmont received another admonition from the Dutch Quaker Peter Hendricks, which was phrased in much stronger language. Hendricks singles out three of van Helmont's teachings that appear to him to contradict Scripture and to be far more consonant with

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[48] Croese, *History of the Quakers*, ibid.
[49] London, Friends' House, MS Yearly Meeting, II, 1695, pp. 91-94.
[50] See Hull, *Furly, passim*.

pagan than Christian philosophy: universal salvation, the eternity of the world, and the transmigration of souls. He entreats van Helmont to keep these ideas to himself, but if this proves impossible to submit them to a committee of Quaker leaders, who can judge their validity. The point had been reached where at least one Quaker felt that the Quakers as a whole must come to a decision about van Helmont's kabbalistic philosophy:

> my worthy friend, in open hearted love, dealing with you as I wished that would happen to me, then I must say to you, that your last stay here has grieved me, because of some theses and teachings you have held and let slip out, yea, and exposed before several friends here, and also to others, which has caused quite some stirrings and unrest with some, rather tending to cloud and alienate their minds from that which the Lord has already begun and achieved in them, than to enlighten them or bring them closer to the truth and power of God: Namely your theses:
>
> firstly: that also all the godless ultimately will be saved etc., which seems flatly to contradict the Scripture and the teachings of the saints.
>
> secondly: of the imperishableness and the everlastingness of this world, consisting however in transubstantiations, out of one being into another, (of which thesis J.V.L.[51] said unto me, that he stood amazed, to hear such from one that moved among friends, as being a thesis, of which he did not know that it was held by anybody else but by atheists etc.)
>
> Thirdly and principally, of the migration of the human soul, from one human body into the other, here in this world. Which thesis in my opinion, after mature deliberation in the fear of the Lord, has much more in common with heathenism, than with the sound doctrine of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> Therefore my friend, my advice and grave desire for you, for the sake of your own safety and salvation, as well as in respect to others and chiefly for the sake of the blessed truth, that you would be pleased to keep these your theses considered before to yourself (so long as they stay with you, and have not been weeded out by the truth and true light and workings of the power of God) and might speak no more to anybody about them, in order that nobody might be harmed by such theses, nor the truth and friends become to be suspected through the same.
>
> If however these matters would be so certain to you that you would think it your bounden duty to make known and expose these and such like theses and teachings to the people when opportunity offers, in such a case my advice to you, and I am well contented with myself that it would also be safe for you, namely: you now going to England, where there are many dear friends, upon whom the Lord has bestowed the spirit of wisdom and discretion, and to whom the Lord has opened many profitable secrecies that are very serviceable to the salvation of the human race. And I hope that in London, etc. there are such people of whom you yourself have such an opinion. That therefore you be pleased, either in a two days meeting there, or in an other meeting arranged for that purpose, consisting of the oldest friends in service, and William Penn, etc. and read out to them your theses considered above and your opinion about them.
>
> And this furthermore is my advice to you, if they in the wisdom of God, would judge such theses and teachings to be not safe or sound, nor in keeping with the truth and the sound doctrine of the saint: that it would be best for you that you were pleased to submit to their judgment in the wisdom of God and to

[51] I am unable to identify J.V.L.

their advice, which they might come to give you with regard to this , for I know that would be safest for you and safest for the truth, I would beheartily glad to understand the same. p.h.[52]

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[52] Peter Hendricks to van Helmont, Amsterdam, 24 December 1681, Colchester, Quaker Meeting House, Colchester MS f. 102: "Waerde vriendt. het is veele jaeren geleden dat ick van u gehoort hebbe, en/meenigmael heb ick de liefde godts in mijn harte gevoelt op rijsende tot unwaerts/ jaeren te vooren eer ick ooijt uw aengesicht uijt wendig heb gesien. En doen ick hoorde/ dat het den heere belieft hadde uwe ogen in maete te openen, dat gij de kostelijke en gesegende waer-/ heit godts begonde tesien, en dat een liefde in u harte was opgeweckt tot deselve en tot de-/ sodaenigen die deselve in getrouwigheit des harten beleven, ick mach waerlijk seggen, dat ikd/ besonder verblijdt was afhetselve, hoopende als gij getrouw quaemt tesijn tot het Lickt, dat/ al dat oude stoff, en al die plantingen die den vaeder neit geplant en heeft mettertijt mochten/ koomen uijt geroeijt te werden. En nu eenige jaeren herwaerts, na dat ick u nu/ en dan ees gesien hebbe en gesprooken, ick mach seegen dat mijn liefde tot u neit/ verminderde, maer wierd eerder toegenoomen en vermeerdert, en ick heb waerlijk/ een respeckt in mijn harte voor u, wegens veele bequademheden en gaeven die u/ den heere verleent heeft booven veele./

Maer mijn vriendt, in open hartige liefde, handelende bij u so als ick wilde/ dat aen mij geschieden soude, so moet ik u seggen, dat u laetste heir sijn mij bedroeft/ heeft, wegens eenige stellingen en leeringen die gij gevoert en u hebt laeten ont-/ vallen, ja, en deselve voorgedraegen voor verscheide vrienden hier, en ook tegens/ andere: het welke vrij wadt werkingen en onrustigheit bij eenige voeroorsaekt heeft,/ streckende eerder om haere gemoederen teverduijsteren en teverwijderen van 't gene den/ heere alrede in haer begonnen en gewrocht heeft, als haer meerder te verlichten, ofte/ naeder tot de waerheit en kracht godts tebrengen: Namelijk uwe stelligen:/

ten eersten, dat ook alle de goddeloose eindelijk sullen saeligwerden, etc:/ 't welck vlack schtjut testrijden tegens de schriftuere, en de leeringen der heiligen/

ten 2 den. vande onverganckelijkheit en het altijt dueren van werelt, bestaende/ echter in verwandeligen, uijt het eene wesen ineen ander./ (van selke stellinge J.V.L. tegens mijseide, dat hij als verbaest stondt, sulcks/ van een tehooren die onder vrienden verkeerde, als sijnde een stellinge, die hij niet en wist/ dat door iemant anders gehouden wierde als door atheisten. etc.)/

ten 3. den en voornaemelijk, van het overgaen vande menschelijke ziele, uijt het/ eene menschelijk lichaem in het ander, hier op dese werelt./ Welke stellinge mijns oordeels, na rijpe overweginge in de vrize des heeren, veel/ meer gemeinschap heeft met het heiden dom, als met de gesonde leere des evangeliums/ onses heeren Jesu Christi./

Derhalven mijn vriendt soude mijn raedt en ernstige begeerte op u sijn, om uw/ enigen veiligheit bij uselven/ geliefde tehouden (solange die bij u blijven en door de waerheit en het waerachtige licht en/ werkingen der kracht godts, neit uijt geroeijt en sijn.) en tegens geen mensch daer meer/ van mochte spreecken, op dat niemant door sulke stellingen beschaedigt, noch de waerheit/ en vrienden door deselve mochten koomen verdacht tewerden.?

Indien echter dese saeken so seeker bij u souden sijn, en dat gij soudt meenen dat het u/ schuldige plicht was dese, en diergelijke stellingen, en leeringen, bij gelegentheit de menschen/ bekent to maeken en voor tedraegen. In sulk een gevall is mijn raet tot uw,/ en ik ben wel voldaen bij mijn selven dat het ook veilig voor u soude wesen,/ naemelijk: gij nu gaende na Engelandt, daer veel dierbaere vrienden sijn, die den/ heere begaeft heeft met den geest der wijsheit en onderscheidinge, en aen welk/ den heere veele heilsaeme verburgentheden geopent heeft die seer dienst volig sijn tot behoudenisse van het menschelijk geslacht. En ick hoop dat/ tot London. etc: sodaenige sijn van welk gij selfs sulck een gevoelen hebt./ Dat gij derhalven gelieft, 't zij op een tweden daegsche vergaedering aldaer, of in een/ ander vergaedering tot dien einde daertoe aengesteldt, vande outste vrienden in/ bedieninge, en willm penn etc: ende leest haer bovengedachte uwe stellingen voor, en uw gevoelen des aengaende./

Ende dit is verder mijm raet tot u, indien sijlieden in de itjsheit godts, sodaenige stellingen en leeringen niet veilig of gesondt souden oordelen tesijn, noch/ over een koomende met de waerheit en de gesonde leere der heiligen: dat her/ dan best voor u soude wesen, u haerlieden oordeel in de wijsheit godts, en haer raet,/ di sij u desaengaende mochten koomen te geven, geliefde te onderwerpen. want ick/ weet dat soude het veiligst voor u sijn en veilgst voor de waerheit, ick/ soude van harten blijde sijn sulcks te verstaen, die be in blijve./

u getrouwe on toegenegen vriendt p.h."

Van Helmont may have replied directly to Hendricks, but if he did, his letter has disappeared. He gave an explicit answer, however, in his *Memoirs*, which he finished dictating to Dr. Daniel Foote in London on October 9, 1682. Here he says that while he has not specifically submitted his writings to the Quakers before their publication, he would be willing to accept any criticisms they might have. From a sentence which is crossed out in the manuscript (but reinserted in brackets in the following quotation) it seems that van Helmont wrote this at the request of several of his Quaker friends, who may have been anxious to show that van Helmont's views could not be attributed to the Quakers as a whole:

> If any one should ask me whether I have communicated these my writings to the Quakers and whether these Questions of mine are according to the mind of that people, to that I answer no, for I expect as well from them as from other sort of people, to be reproved in case I be guilty of any error herein, and shall be ready to receive an answer or confutation from any of them, they being addicted generally more to practise and Experience of Christianity than to the speculative knowledge and search of such things, herein they are to be commended. This aforesaid disgression is discovered on purpose [because some of the people called Quakers] because it was desired of me by some friends for reasons which need not be mentioned.[53]

Van Helmont was willing to have his theories examined by the Quakers but was unlikely to abide by their opinions, judging them poorly grounded in "speculative knowledge." Nonetheless he admired the Quakers greatly. Their doctrine of the "inner light" as the direct bond between God and man fit in well with his own mystical and kabbalistic search for unity within the universe. The simple lives and unsophisticated manners of the Quakers harmonized with van Helmont's image of himself as the "wanderinge eremite," free from the distractions of money, family, and position. Van Helmont saw the Quakers as playing an essential role in the process of restoring the world to its original purity; they were the people who, according to the Book of Revelations, would suffer and be persecuted for trying to unite the Church. He valued them accordingly:

> But if I were a man working after temporall honors I would not have joyned myself to a people that despised honour and whose principles it is not to fight and defend themselves, and to perform what Christ and his Apostles and other Holy men have commanded and because they follow Christs example in doing and practising before they teach others. Therefore also their teaching is far more powerfull than others and for that very reason are they persecuted by them and therefore are called fools because they lose their lives, are imprisoned. . . and lose their estates, and yet all this while continue full of Love and without revenge, being always ready to help one another. And those that will not amend and repent amongst them they do excommunicate. . . . They live soberly, their word being yea, yea, and nay, nay, and every one loves to deal with them because they keep their word. And when the Church which is in the wilderness, that is divided and scattered, will come to be united, the first that shall attempt that union must suffer and will be persecuted by others in all

[53] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Iv.

> manners, and this time is near at hand for we are near to the Evening of the 2,000 years Sabbath. . . . And those men have the expressions of all mysticall writers verified in themselves tho they be such as can neither read nor write and they preach very sensible with much authority and power, which is the thing that vexeth many that they preach the gospel freely and spoil the bread of others.[54]

However, although van Helmont greatly admired the Quakers and considered himself still "joined" to them in some measure, he continues his *Memoirs* by making it perfectly clear that he is not a member of their sect, nor of any sect, but values every man who is "leade by the spirit of God":

> Nothwithstandinge all that I have said above of this people (unjustly and ignominiously called Quakers) yett I would be rightly understood that I am one that cultivate not a sect, or separate company of people and (according to the sectarian manner) do not thinke that any one sort of people of God, and all the other sorts to be rejected and reprobated by the lumpe also as wicked and ungodly. For certaine it is that wisdome is only justified of her children, and her own children are they only that feare God and worke righteously of every sort, division, company or sect of people whatsoever, wheresoever, and whensoever. And I acknowledge only but two sorts of men: viz: the good and the bad: the good are those who really know, love and obey God without all pretext, and really are taught and leade by the spirit of God into all truth and are faithful and sincere in the discharge of what God hath bene pleased to reveale or make known to them. And the bad are those who are either openly or manifestly so, or, such as hide and cloake wickedness under some forme or profession of religion. Therefore I own and am one with every man of the first sort, lett him be called by any name whatsoever and I disowne any of the other sort lett him be amongst what sort of people soever professinge religion. Now therefore I also declare that the people (called Quakers) may have many (perhaps too many) amongst them who are not faithfull to what they own as their principle, to which their practise is too often quite dissonant. These I disown, be they who or how many soever they be. But of the faithfull and true hearted I say, that certainly of all the sorts of men professinge the primitive, apostolicall and true Christianity they are att this time the principall people with whom is the life and truth as it is in Jesus and his only spirite.[55]

The meeting which Hendricks proposed to van Helmont, in which the Quakers could investigate his theories did not take place in 1682. It may have occurred two years later, however, precipitated by the publication in English of van Helmont's *Cabbalistical Dialogue* and the *Two Hundred Queries*. A fascinating memorandum exists from George Fox to the Second Day's Morning Meeting of the Quakers, dated 19 November, 1684, which shows that Fox was highly critical of van Helmont's speculations. His directive to the Meeting is worth quoting in full. From the first few lines one can see that Fox advocated censorship, at least among the Quakers themselves, a practice that had begun a full ten years earlier.[56] As the introductory

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[54] Van Helmont, *Memoirs*, fol. Hr.

[55] ibid., fol. Iv.

[56] Mortimer, "The First Century of Quaker Printers. Part I": "With the onset of the Caroline persecution it had become of great importance for Friends themselves to secure orthodoxy in the works printed in their name so that no unnecessary cause of offence should be given. This

heading makes clear, the memorandum concerns ". . .all the books that are not printed with the Consent and unity of Antient faithful friends." Fox continues by stipulating that Quaker printers cease advertising or distributing books that have not been approved by the Quakers as a whole. He wants it to be agreed, "That no printer do set any such books on ye backside of friends books neither that he do give notice of them into ye Country, nor sent [send] any down; or if they do they must take them again, till they be sent for."[57] One of the books that Fox wanted the meeting to examine, van Helmont's *Cabbalisticall dialogue*, had been printed by Benjamin Clarke, a Quaker printer who had been cautioned before about the need for printing only what was approved by the Second Day's Morning Meeting.[58]

In his article on Quaker printers Mortimer describes Clarke as the most scholarly and liberal minded of all the early Quaker printers. In addition to books by Quakers—and it should be pointed out that he printed some of Keith's works—he printed John Matern's *Compendium Trium Linguarum latinae, Graecae & Hebraicae* in 1679. He was therefore just the sort of printer to share van Helmont's (and Keith's) kabbalistic interests. Consequently it may not be a coincidence that Clarke's association with the Quakers appears to have ended in 1683, just at the time van Helmont's kab-

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became easier as those working for them were in closer touch and amenable to oversight, and dependent on Friends' approval for the satisfactory disposal of their productions. With the establishment of the Second Day's Morning Meeting of ministers in London (minutes extant from 1673) evidence is available of the oversight and control of the press which Friends exercised." See also Littleboy, "Devonshire Reference Library." Littleboy gives many examples of censorship: "The care of the Morning Meeting was exercised over the publication of Friends' books, and a great part of the weekly meetings was taken up in reading through the works which Friends desired to publish, that such works might bear the *Imprimateur* of the Society. The censorship was strict" (p. 2). The Quakers were so concerned about the publicity caused by the Keithian controversy that they bought up books sent over from Pennsylvania because they feared they would "have a Tendency to reproach of Truth and the ffriends in it, by the ill construction our Adversaries may make therefor ["Morning meeting minutes for 15, ix, 1692." Cited in Littleboy, p. 5). On Quaker self-censorship see Bailey, *New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism*, ch. 7. On self-censorship in general during this period see Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England.*

[57] As Mortimer points out, the printers themselves warehoused the books and collected the money for those books sent outside of London ("The First Century of Quaker Printers," p. 39). Mortimer identifies the following as Quaker printers: Giles Calvert, Thomas Brewster, Thomas Simmonds, Mary Westwood, Robert Wilson, Simon Dover, John White, William Warwick, Andrew Sowle and his daughter Trace, and Benjamin Clarke.

[58] The Morning Meeting for August 6, 1680 made the following decisions about Isaac Penington's *Treatise*: "that head about the Souls food, to be left out, & not to be printed. . . [and] the seven underscored lines (in page 20th of ye book, entitled, A question to the Professors of Christianity) be wholly left out of all Impressions; Ben Clark to take Care therein" (ibid., p. 40, note 4). Many books were dismissed as "not convenient to be printed." The following entry from the *Morning Meeting Minutes* provides an example: "William Tomlinsons book entitled Essentiall Christianity etc. read, which friends are not satisfyed should be printed as it is, there being many things likely to be made ill use of. So Richard Richardson is desired to speak to him of it, that if he can be satisfyed, it may be laid by, else that it be considerably altered" (London, Friend's House, *Morning Meeting Minutes* 1672-1693. Cited in Mortimer, p. 59).

balistic ideas began to meet opposition.[59] Benjamin Clarke may well have been drawn into the circle of "Helmontians," who became increasing unwelcome among the Quakers. He was obviously a close friend and admirer of van Helmont. In the preface to a devotional work he printed on van Helmont's advice, Clarke describes him as "my singular good friend," and he shared van Helmont's concern about the divisiveness among Christians:

> Reader,
> The Consideration of the many Books of Controversies daily increasing, and the ill Effect it has upon men; filling their Heads with needless Disputes; and, which is worse, with Heats and Animosities one against another, to the eating out of that Love and Charity one to another, which Christ profest amongst his as the only Character of his disciples, has caused some Serious Persons in Germany to decline very much the reading such Treatises, and only to converse with the Divine Scriptures, and such books as direct to the inward Life, Spirit and Power by which they were write. . . . And amongst these, one, to bring people back to the simplicity of Christ's Commands, which are more plain and easie to be understood, without the help of any man that makes a Trade and Merchandize of them, did collect out of the New Testament One hundred passages, which he stiled the Hundred Commandments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and committed the same to Print in the Hight Dutch Tongue, which, being brought into England, and caused to be Translated into English by my singular good friend Franciscus Mercurnius [sic], and shewed unto me, I have for the General Good, thought fit thus to publish, not doubting but these will be acceptable and profitable to all serious Persons, being free from all mixture of Errour or Falshood: use them well, and prosper.[60]

However sympathetic this Quaker printer may have been to van Helmont's theories, George Fox was not. Fox's hostility is readily apparent in his memorandum to the Second Day's Morning Meeting. He advises the Quakers to take a careful look at van Helmont's books:

> that some friends [on?] ye second day do meet together, about van Helmont's books lately printed (viz: one of queries and another ye Cabbalistical Discourse, etc) that they may view them over, and give testimony concerning them, that ffriends may be caution'd and Truth cleared.[61]

Fox then lists seven points which he hopes the meeting will consider:

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[59] Mortimer., p. 46: "Of all the early printers Clark appears to have had the broadest outlook and most scholarly connections. Among his first known productions is numbered Barclay's *An Epistle of Love and Friendly Advice, To the Ambassadors of the several Princes of Europe, met at Nimenguen to Consult the Peace of Christendom*, and among schoolbooks Christopher Taylor and John Matern's *Compendium Trium Linguarum latinae, Graecae & Hebraicae*, for use at Waltham Abbey school (1679). In the next five years he issued over sixty books for Friends, but his imprint does not appear after 1683. Among his authors are numbered Robert Barclay, Steven Crisp, Thomas Ellwod, Thomas Lawson, Isaac Penington, William Penn and George Keith."

[60] *Christ's Hundred Commandments: or, the precepts of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ. collected out of the Scriptures (verbatim) For General good to all People* (London: Printed for Benjamin Clark, 1682).

[61] London, Friends' House, Memorandum from Fox to the Second Day's Meeting about printing and van Helmont's books (Port. 10-3).

Query 1. Whether or no van Helmont, will own all these books that are come forth, and stand to them, that he hath printed and published—among ffriends, and make them good, before he goes into the country?

2. Whether the Serpent was not the first questioner, and by his questions did affirm lies to Eve?

3. Whether the Apostles were not troubled with the Doctors about questions and strife of Words?

4. Whether van Helmont's questions are Learned or unlearned? If learned, then he will make them good and stand by them.

5. And if Learned, whether they are Learned by ye Holy Ghost, or unclean Ghost.

6. And who are the *some* that say, the soul of man is a woman's under-petticoat (as V. Helmont said to Mary fforster; you may speak to Mary fforster[62] about it).

7. And whether such an Expression is not or Ranterisme and Atheisme.[63]

Fox was clearly suspicious of intellectuals. The serpent, as he says, was the first questioner, and van Helmont put all his writings in the form of queries. It is sadly ironic that Fox should suggest van Helmont's books contributed to that "strife of Words" which van Helmont himself was at such pains to end. Fox was in some ways like Henry More. He believed that simple faith was worth far more than complex philosophizing. He was obviously shocked by van Helmont's description of the soul as in an "under-petticoat," which he undoubtedly thought was blasphemous and ridiculous. He would have been even less pleased had he realized that van Helmont was in all probability referring to the age-old discussion about the existence and properties of the "astral body."[64] Fox did not consciously sympathize with Platonism, Neoplatonism, or the Kabbalah, although historians have pointed out the influences of all these sources on the Quakers.[65]

Whether or not the Second Day's Morning Meeting considered van Helmont's books as Fox wished is not known; no minutes remain. But from a letter written by Benjamin Furly to William Penn in July, 1684 it appears that van Helmont's opponents among Quakers and non-Quakers as well were gaining the upper hand. Furly is clearly distressed by the way van Helmont is being treated, all the more because he himself was so partial to the theory of

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[62] Mary Foster provides an example of how relatively liberated Quaker women were. Like many others she wrote books. One was vetted by the Morning Meeting in June, 1684 (Friend's House, Morning Minutes 1673-1692, p. 61).

[63] ibid.

[64] See Walker, "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine." The concept of the astral body was picked up from Neoplatonic texts during the Renaissance and incorporated into Christian thought. Those who wrote about the astral body did so with caution because the Church frowned upon the concept as pagan and magical. The astral body was considered to be the ethereal covering acquired by the soul during its descent from heaven to earth. It acted as a mean between the soul and the body and proved useful in explaining how the soul could move the body. Glanvil discusses the astral body in his *Lux Orientalis*, p. 122, and calls it the soul's "inward vest," a description which is not unlike van Helmont's reference to a "woman's under-petticoat." The astral body was an important concept in Neoplatonic theology. See Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, pp. 313-21. It also played an important role in Paracelsus' philosophy. See Hannaway, *Chemists and the Word*, pp. 29ff.

[65] See, for example, Nuttall, "Unity with the Creation."

transmigration presented in the *Two Hundred Queries*. Referring to this book, he writes:

> when thou readst [it], I doubt not but thou wilt see that it goes further than any system yet publikly received by any [sect?] of Christians to the clearing the divine providence, Justice, mercy & wisdom of god & rendring the most perplext articles of the Christian faith, easily conceivable to the meanest as well as largest capacity. So it is with me notwithstanding all the hot Zeale with which some pursue it, and him in Enlgand, stigmatizing him as a Papist, a Jesuit, yea a kind of Atheist, which rude, unmannerly, and unmanly treating of a man of his quality, age, reputation in the world, harmless deportment, going up & down doing good to all & harm to none, especially if we consider with all that he is a forreigner, every ingenious Englishman should be ashamed of & blush at; I hope if he, or any of his perswasion in some of those things should come thither they shall not be so hunted as Foxes, but received as Christians, & not be held unchristian for an opinion which if christ did not [teach?] his disciples he at least did bear[est?] with in them, & therefore must neither be in it self destructive of faith in [god?] nor of a holy conversation. But I shall forbear Apologizing, & leave the booke to Apologize for it self.[66]

Whatever the exact nature of the reaction to van Helmont's theories was, it did not stop van Helmont from broadcasting his views. He was well-aware of the suspicions the Quakers had of the Kabbalah and the doctrine of transmigration, but it was the great work of his life to spread this idea, which he felt certain would unite mankind in a true and vital understanding of a just and merciful God. One of van Helmont's oldest and closest friends, Tobias Ludwig Kohlhans, also a Quaker, wrote a pamphlet in which he describes what a firm hold the theory of revolution had on van Helmont's thought throughout the whole of his adult life. Kohlhans wrote his pamphlet in 1696 to correct the errors that he and every other Quaker had found in Croese's history of their Society. One of the errors he mentions is Croese's suggestion that van Helmont only began to believe in the revolution of souls as a result of his association with Anne Conway at Ragley. Kohlhans denies this and maintains that van Helmont had believed in the theory as early as 1660:

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[66] Furly to Penn, 13/23 July, 1684. *The Papers of William Penn*, II, letter no. 185. The sentiments expressed by Furly in this letter suggest to me that he may be the anonymous author of *A Letter to a Gentleman, Touching the Treatise Entitled, Two hundred Queries concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls, and its Conformity to the Truths of Christianity*. By a Pacifick Christian, a Member of the Catholick Church, tho' not of the Roman Synagogue, falsely so called. This listed under N.N. [nullum nomen/no name] Philanthropos in the British Library catalogue. The defense of van Helmont in this book sounds very much like the defense in Furly's letter to Penn: ". . . the Author, for his Good-will to Christianity, for his Love to God and his Neighbors, discovered by putting himself to the pains of thinking out this System to the clearing of the Divine Attributes of God's Justice, Mercy, and Wisdom, and rendering the. . . articles of the Christian Religion so plain to the very meanest, as well as to the largest Capacity, that no Atheist can rationally oppose them, deserves, I should think, to be treated with all Humanity and Christian Candour by the People of our Nation, whom he honoured with the fist Propositions of this Nature.

And not, for every little Error or Mistake, be rudely run upon, unmannerly and unmanlike traduced with those vile Names of Papist, Jesuit, Atheist, and what not. A thing too common with many of the Professors of our Nation" (p. 53).

> If the author had conversed with van Helmont for a few days or even for a few hours, I am certain that he would not have written thus, for I would almost say that it is impossible for Helmont to extract his ideas from books and there are those who have conversed with him for thirty-six and more years, not for an hour or two a day but continuously, who know that he has believed in the revolution of human souls throughout the entire period and even previously and that he had fearlessly spoken about it and did not come to adopt this opinion subsequent to his residence with the Countess in Question.[67]

In the year after Fox wrote his memorandum, van Helmont published his *Paradoxal Discourses*, in which he restates his belief in the transmigration of souls. In this book van Helmont reiterates all the points that he, Keith, and Anne Conway had made in favor of transmigration in the *Two Hundred Queries,* and he again takes the position that matter does not really exist, only different degrees of spirit. Just as in the earlier books, the strongest argument in favor of preexistence and reincarnation comes from a consideration of the divine attributes.

> Now which way can we reconcile with the Attributes of God that he who is a wise and perfect Creator, who hath created all things in some wise order, that they might all at last be able to attain their full and ultimate perfection, should have created such imperfect Creatures as Fools and Naturals, Abortions and Monsters and all those wicked and barbarous men we find in the world, etc? Now to suppose that all these must continue in this their state of imperfection, would not this run directly contrary to the forementioned Attributes? But how can this be, that God should work and act contrary to his own nature and himself?[68]

Vindictiveness is not part of the divine nature. God's justice requires that he punish his creatures according to their misdeeds and for their improvement. Evil cannot be absolute, and at some future and glorious time, all things will be perfected:

> the punishment of wicked men is not to be looked upon as that whereby the Creature should still become worse and worse; but as it is in order to the changing of it from Evil to Good, for that when the Evil is transchanged, the Good then begins to work upwards, by innumerable steps of ascension towards God, though it can never reach so high as to reach his Being or Essence, (forasmuch as it is impossible that a Creature should become God) but must therefore continue to mount upwards, and continually attain to more and greater degrees of Glory.[69]

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[67] Kohlhans, (Philaletha), *Dilucidationes quaedam valde necessariae in Gerardi Croesi Historiam Quakerianam*, pp. 120-1: "Si paucorum dierum imo paucarum horarum spatio autor conversatus cum hoc viro, mibi certo persuadeo, haec sua verba heic non adessent, nam in suis rebus ex libris differere, ipsi, pene dixerim, impossibile, & sunt, qui eo cum ante triginta sex & plures annos conversationem non per unam vel alteram horam, aut diem, sed per annum habuere, qui norunt certissime & ipsis tunc temporibus & ante ista eum hanc de Revolutione opinionem fovisse & intrepide de ea locutum fuisse, nec apud Comtissam istam postmodum solum in eam indicisse."

[68] Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses,* pp. 106-107.

[69] ibid., pp. 136-137.

At the time he wrote his *Paradoxal Discourses* van Helmont was as convinced as ever that the Lurianic doctrine of the transmigration of souls had a great deal to offer Christianity. He reiterated the point he had made so often before, that if Christians accepted this one doctrine, discord and contention would come to an abrupt and welcome end:

> And may we not here take occasion to consider whether this be not one of the chief points of Scripture, and wherein is contained a singular great mystery of that wisdom which hitherto hath been concealed and hid from the most in Europe? And whether our ignorance of the same be not the cause of most of that Confusion and contention, which is amongst those who are called Christians, as for instance, about Praedestination, Justification, etc. And whether all these Differences and Contests may not be taken out of the way by this Doctrine of Revolution, when once the same shall be clearly made out, and generally received.[70]

Van Helmont mentions one new argument in favor of the theory of preexistence in his *Paradoxal Discourses.* He enlists the help of science in support of the Lurianic Kabbalah by referring to Swammerdam's and Kerckring's work on anatomy. Swammerdam and Kerckring believed that a woman was born with all the eggs which she would later produce.[71] In the diagrams of the female reproductive organs included in their books, van Helmont found a confirmation of the kabbalistic theory that the souls of every individual was preformed and contained in the figure of the primordial man *Adam Kadmon:*[72]

> we may take notice, that every present thing doth contain the seeds of all the future individuals of its kind, as it self also was contained in the seeds of the thing already past. Wherefore there are as many things as there are seeds, and neither more nor less.[73]

In taking this position, van Helmont accepted the most popular of the two current theories about generation, the preformation theory rather than the theory of epigenesis.[74] The preformation theory that life is a process of development, unfolding, or expansion, rather than generation proper, fit nicely with the elder van Helmont's theory of the *archeus.* It also led to the idea of *emboitement* with the belief that all individuals were enclosed one within another in a line back to Adam, who contained the whole human race within himself. This was precisely the idea favored by the Lurianic Kabbalists and Francis Mercury van Helmont.

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[70] ibid., p. 109.

[71] Van Helmont refers to Swammerdam in his *Paradoxal Discourses*, pt. 2, p. 9, and to Kerckring in the same book, pt. 2, pp. 22ff. During 1670 to 1671, de Graaf, Swammerdam, and Kerckring had, independently of each other, discovered what they thought to be ova. All three mistook the "Graafian follicles," in which the ova are produced, for the ova themselves. See Needham, *A History of Embryology*, pp. 141ff; Roger, *Les Sciences de la Vie*, pp. 264ff.

[72] Van Helmont refers to one particular diagram from Swammerdam's *Miraculum Naturae, sive Uteri Muliebris Fabrica* (*Paradoxal Discourses*, pt. 2, p. 9).

[73] Van Helmont, *Genesis*, pp. 58-59.

[74] See Needham, *Embryology*, pp. 96ff; Roger, *Les Sciences de la Vie*, pp. 325ff. Pinto-Correia, *The Ovary of Eve.*

Van Helmont never gave up his interest in the Lurianic Kabbalah or his belief in the transmigration of souls. In his very last book, *Thoughts on the first four Chapters of Genesis,* which was published a year before his death in 1697, he expresses the same views. Everything is alive and capable of greater and greater perfection:

> at length, by innumerable Transplantations or Removes of Deaths, Lives, Feedings, and Regenerations, all things might be Transported into Man, in, and by whom, they were to be Glorified.[75]

Van Helmont's views on transmigration were so well known that they became the object of satire. John Dunton wrote a book entitled *A Voyage Round the World,* which was published in 1691 and provided Laurence Sterne with a model for *Tristram Shandy.* Dunton begins his book with a chapter entitled "Of my Rambles before I came into my Mother's Belly, and while I was there," a most amusing and intentionally garbled account of van Helmont's theory of transmigration. He has particular fun in ridiculing Luria's belief that a human being absorbs and elevates what he eats:

> But not to mount the Argument above my Readers Head, lest I should crack both that and my own—Let it suffice, that my *Soul* for ought I know, has been *Rambling* the best part of this 6,000 *Years,* if those are in the right on't who hold the preaexistence, and that all Souls were made at once.
>
> However—for my *Body,* I can make Affidavit on't—that't has been *Rambling* so long and so far before my Soul stumbled upon't that I *lose the Track,* and can go no further. All matter is in motion, and therefore perpetually chang'd and alter'd—now in how many shapes that *little handful* which makes up my Souls luggage has been formerly *dress'd,* I'll promise you, I'll not undertake to tell ye.
>
> As great a *Coward* as I am, there may have gone I know not how many *particles of a Lyon* into my Composition, and as *small as my Body* is, my *great* Grandfather might be made out of a Whale or and Elephant. You remember the Story of the *Dog that kill'd the Cat, that eat the Rat*—or I love to illustrate *Philosophical Problems,* with common Instances for the use of the less knowing part of the World,—why just so here. To prove, I may have a piece of a Roaring Lyon rambled into me,—How can any man alive prove but as long ago as the *Holy War,* some or other of my Ancestors waited on K. *Richard into Palestine,* and was there with him when he killed the Lyon. This Gentleman might have a Dog—this dog being hungry, might fall a tearing the Guts of this Lyon, some of whose Body must pass into the Dogs, as well as other only tro' it. This *Dog* might come home with the Gentleman agen, and at length coming to some untimely end, his Noble Carcass lye rotting in the Fields—which very place being fatned with his corrupted Carcass, might produce some *Tufts of Larger Grass* than ordinary, wherein undoubtedly would be included some Particles of the poor deceased Creature,—which Particles might very easily be devour'd by some fat Ox, *or Weather* grazing there, allured by the length and beauty of the grass, and so become part of this Sheep or Oxe,—and *they agen,* being brought to the Spacious Table of some of my *Worthy Ancestors,* might Communicate the same Subtile parts of the *Grass, the Sheep, the Oxe, the Dog, the Lyon* to their Trenchers, thence to their Mouth, Stomach, Blood,—and in *two removes more,* to their Son and Heir, *so from Generation to Generation,* till

[75] Van Helmont, *Genesis,* p. 76.

> at last, all center'd in the *Lyon-like Evander*—This I say may be, and Graver folks than he have made a huge splutter with such a kind of business;—but I am apt to think (*between Friends*) if there be any thing in't, that most of the Lyoness Particles rambled *somewhere else*, to another Branch of the Family; and that more of the *Sheep*, the gentle Lamb, or such harmless innocent Creatures *Rambled* into my Composition.[76]

There was no comfort for the Quakers in this satire of their illustrious convert. But although they were obviously worried by van Helmont's strange beliefs (and had been for a number of years), there is only one suggestion that they actually expelled van Helmont because of them. In 1692 a doctoral thesis was written by J.H. Nothwanger in which he says that van Helmont was officially expelled from the Society of Quakers because of his views on the revolution of souls.[77]

This statement lacks evidence to support it. There is no paper officially setting forth the Quakers' disownment of van Helmont, as there was for Keith and the other Quakers who earned their Society's displeasure; and no reputable Quaker historian writing at that time or later mentions such a straightforward end to the relationship between van Helmont and the Quakers. It is more reasonable to assume that the break was gradual, that it occurred more by mutual agreement than by one-sided pronouncement.

Some time after 1684 van Helmont and the Quakers must have realized that they had come to an impasse. In the letters Benjamin Furly wrote to John Locke between 1687 and 1698, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, he often mentions van Helmont and his visits to Furly's home, but he never speaks of van Helmont as if he were still a serious and contributing member of the Quaker community. By the time the Keithian Controversy had ended, however, the Quakers had publicly repudiated the theory of transmigration of souls. Although van Helmont was in England during that year and part of the next, staying with Locke at Oates. He took no part in the controversy and did not try to change the Quakers' attitude towards transmigration.

Van Helmont commented on the controversy only at a distance, when he was at Hanover and in the company of Leibniz during July 1696. An echo of what he said appears in a letter Leibniz wrote to his Scots correspondent, Thomas Burnett:

> It is only too true that those who are very learned are not always illuminated by the true light to an equal degree; indeed, there are very few who know what this Light is. I doubt very much if your Quakers know it, however much they may talk about it, in particular your Monsieur Penn, who is at present fighting one of his colleagues Monsieur Keith, who, Monsieur van Helmont says, is clever and has translated into English from the Latin of the late Monsieur Pocoke the very

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[76] Dunton, *A Voyage Round the World*, pp. 27-29. Dunton's parody was close to the mark. See van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, pp. 129-130. This same Dunton published Croese's *History of the Quakers* and included criticisms of the Quakers in his satirical *Athenian Gazette* and *Athenian Mercury*.

[77] C. Loscher, *praeses*, and J.H. Nothwanger, *respondent*, *De glorioso Animarum Coelo*, xiv-xv, pp. 30-34.

> excellent Book of an Arab authour entitled the Self-taught Philosopher, which I read formerely with unusual pleasure.[78]

Perhaps after his doctrine of transmigration and his friend Keith were both repudiated by the Quakers, van Helmont concluded that the Quakers had never understood the concept of the "light within." He must have thought some such thing, for Leibniz described van Helmont in September 1696 as no longer a Quaker but as a "Seeker":

> Monsieur Francis Mercurius, Baron of Helmont, son of the famous physician of that name, is an old acquaintance of Madame, the Electress of Hanover. He had been a Roman Catholic, but subsequently a Quaker and while at Hanover called himself a Seeker.[79]

Van Helmont had always been a seeker, not just in the sense that he had joined the fringes of the sect known as the Seekers, or Collegiants, but as one who was in continual quest of knowledge. He wandered in and out of many sects before he committed himself to Quakerism, and when the Keithian Controversy and his own unshakable beliefs made it impossible for him to remain a Quaker, van Helmont again assumed the role of a seeker.

In retrospect, van Helmont's conversion to Quakerism was only an episode in his life. The fertility of van Helmont's thought, his interest in alchemy, medicine, Platonism, mysticism, and particularly the Kabbalah proved too much for the Quakers. They were not the group he had thought they were, a suitable foundation for his kabbalistic version of the Christian religion. Striving to prove their orthodoxy, they could not assume responsibility for van Helmont's unorthodox imaginings. Van Helmont's connection with the Quakers ended although he wore their simple dress, spoke about the "inner light" and practiced the virtues of humility and charity to the end of his days.

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[78] Leibniz to Thomas Burnett, 17/27 July 1696. G III:184: ". . . il n'est que trop vray que ceux sont fort scavans, ne sont pas tousjours fort eclaires par la veritable lumiere, et il y a bine peu qui scachent ce que c'est que cette lumiere. Je doute for que vos Trembleurs le scachent, quelque bruit qu'il en fassent, sur tout vostre M. Penn, qui es en guerre maintement avec un de ses confreres nomme M. Keith, que M. Helmont m'a dit estre habile, et avoir tradult en Anglois du Latin de feu M. Pockokius le livre tout a fait excellent d'un auteur Arabe, intitule Philosophe Autodidacte, que j'ay lu autresfois avec un plaisir extraordinaire."

[79] Klopp, *Correspondence de Leibniz avev l'Electrice Sophie,* II:8: "M. Francois Mercure Baron de Helmont, fils du celebre medecin de ce nom, estoit une vielle connoissance de Mad. l'Electrice d'Hanover. Il evoit este Catholique Romain. Il se fit ensuite Trembleur, et se disoit un Chercheur dans le temps qu'il estoit a Hanover."

CHAPTER TWELVE

JOHN LOCKE, BENJAMIN FURLY, AND THE KABBALAH

What could John Locke, the alleged champion of reason and most famous exponent of British empiricism,[1] possibly have to say to Francis Mercury van Helmont, an alchemist, Kabbalist, and Quaker?

Van Helmont figures prominently in Locke's correspondence; but as in the case of van Helmont's association with Leibniz this has been entirely overlooked. Locke and van Helmont were friends because of their mutual interest in medicine, alchemy, and natural philosophy, their sincere interest in education and improving the lot of the poor,[2] and their heartfelt desire to promote tolerance and ecumenism. Locke was not the purely secular philosopher he is all-too-often characterized as being by modern authors; his interest in epistemology was a result of his deep religious concerns and wish to establish a firm basis for Christianity. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was written expressly because he and several of his friends could not resolve certain religious and moral questions.[3]

Locke's philosophy developed from the 1660s to the 1690s. In the 1660s he accepted the view of the vast majority of his contemporaries that innate ideas provided the only sure foundation for morality and religion; he was an unequivocal opponent of religious toleration and the right of political resistance; and he supported the right of governments to prescribe arbitrarily

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[1] "John Locke, the founder of British empiricism, was also the seventeenth century's staunchest defender of reason in religion and politics." Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, back cover.

[2] Both van Helmont and Locke were interested in manufacturing schemes to employ the poor and in ways to help the poor through reform in the poor law (Locke) and the setting up of legitimate pawn shops (van Helmont). They were both also interested in improving education. For Locke's interest in these matters, see Locke's published works and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke c. 30: references to linen manufacture with plans for promoting manufacture of linen in Ireland; fol. 86 on the employment of poor children and vagrants; fol. 94 an early draft by Locke of his scheme of poor-law reform.

[3] As he says in his Epistle to the Reader, "*Were it fit to trouble thee with the History of this Essay, I should tell thee that five or six Friends meeting at my Chamber, and discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it came into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we set our selves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abiliities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with*" (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 7). That the subject Locke and his friends were discussing was the basis for morality comes out in the *Essay* proper. See, for example I, i, 6, 46: "Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct. If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions, and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge."

"indifferent"[4] matters in both Church and state. In addition, he was a Trinitarian, who accepted the idea of original sin and the fall. All this changed over the next twenty-five years as Locke became increasingly unorthodox in both religion and politics, advocating a radical ideal of self-determination in both spheres. These significant changes were largely due to the changing nature of Locke's circumstances and friendships. His years on the continent, especially in Holland from 1683 to 1688, were important in this regard because of the unusual degree of freedom in thought and expression tolerated there.[5] Van Helmont was one of many people Locke met in Holland. It is the purpose of this chapter to chart the course of their friendship, to explain its basis, and suggest the various ways their ideas converged.

Locke and van Helmont were mutual friends of Benjamin Furly (1636-1714), an English merchant, Quaker, and eventual free thinker, who had settled in Holland as a young man. Both stayed with Furly in Rotterdam for extended and overlapping periods, and both were members of the "Lantern," a group founded by Furly, consisting of free-spirited individuals who saw themselves as beckons of light in an all-too-intolerant world. Furly was very much involved in the religious and philosophical issues of the day. As the leading Quaker in Rotterdam he authored and translated books defending his co-religionists. These defenses were largely based on his close reading of the biblical text, readings made possible by his abilities as a linguist and scholar. Furly's library was exceptional for the period both in terms of its size and contents. Among the approximately 4,400 books were a number of traditional defenses of Christianity. But in addition to these he owned many works by sectarians and heretics as well as radical works by Spinoza, Bayle, Hobbes, Toland, Trenchard, Collins, and Blount, which presaged the Deism, skepticism, and irreligion characteristic of the Enlightenment. Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, a reknowned collector of manuscripts and books, particularly theological ones, visited Furly's library in 1710, and was struck by what he described as the "curious stock of Books, mainly *suspectae fidei*."[6] Furly's overwhelming interest in biblical criticism and theology is attested by the fact that almost half of the books dealt with these subjects.[7] It

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[4] These were the so-called "adiophora," or peripheral matters such as ceremonial forms (bowing at name of Jesus, using the sign of the cross in baptism, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, wearing the surplice, etc.).

[5] Marshall, *John Locke*, pp. xvi and 78, n. 7.

[6] "On the morning of November 21, we went Op-Te Haaring Vliet, to visit Benjamin Furly, an English Merchant, who was the chief of the Quakers in Holland, and possesses a curious stock of Books, mainly *suspectae fidei*. He lives in a very fine house, and is a man of about sevently years of age, and of peculiar actions.

We were ushered into his comptoir as it was called, but this appeared more like a library or Museum than a mercantile counting house, as the walls were shelved and covered with books, to the number of at least four thousand. They were mostly on theological subjects, of the *suspectae fidei* order, and appear to be well suited to Mr. Benjamin Furly's taste, who is a paradoxical and peculiar man, who soon gave us to understand that he adhered to no special religion" (W. I. Hull, *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam*, p. 152) This account was published in von Uffenbach's *Memoirs*. Von Uffenbach's visit to Furly's library indicates its importance.

[7] *Bibliotheca Furliana*. This catalogue divides the collection into the following categories: 2,177 books on the Bible and theology (pp. 1-163); 250 on Church history (pp. 163-81); 586 on

was largely as a result of their excursions into biblical criticism, encouraged by the reading of unorthodox and heretical literature, that Furly, Locke, and van Helmont came to reject the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, original sin, predestination, and the eternity of hell on the grounds that there was no basis for these in Scripture. This is a subject that will be discussed in greater depth at a later point. But it should be pointed out here that among the books in both Locke's and Furly's library were a number by van Helmont, which rejected these doctrines.

John Marshall describes Furly's house as being "at the epicentre of the early Enlightenment."[8] It is surely interesting that an alchemist, Kabbalist, and supposed "Judaizer" like van Helmont was present at this epicenter and that it attracted a wide variety of intellectuals. As one can see from perusing Locke's correspondence, those whom Furly, Locke, and van Helmont counted as close friends were united in their staunch opposition to intolerance and persecution, although they differed widely in their interests, religious affiliations, and beliefs. Jean Philippus van Limborch[9] and Jean Le Clerc,[10] for example, were leading Remonstrants who battled constantly against intolerance in all forms, Catholic and Protestant. The Remonstrants were in major respects similar to the English Latitudinarians.[11] Both groups rejected the doctrines of predestination and reprobation, and although they agreed that Scripture contained truths beyond reason only discoverable by revelation, they insisted that these truths had to be interpreted and evaluated in the light

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secular history (181-236); 377 on Philosophy (pp. 237-270); 249 on lexicography and grammar (270-84); 401 miscellaneous (pp. 321-439). The languages represented were Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Czech, Dutch, Polish, Swedish, Norse, Icelandic, Finnish, Russian, North American Indian, Anglo-Saxon, Flemish, Gothic, Helvetic, Irish.

[8] Marshall, *John Locke*, p. 331. See also Hull, *Benjamin Furly.*

[9] Philippus van Limborch (1633-1712), was the leader of the Dutch Remonstrants and one of Locke's closest friends. He corresponded with Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, with whom he had much in common. He was appointed Professor of Theology at the Remonstrants' seminary in Amsterdam in 1668. Van Limborch's writings helped to define and defend Remonstrant teachings. With Christian Hartsoeker, he published a collection of letters between Jacob Arminius and his friends and the sermons of Episcopius, the first two leaders of the Remonstrants. Van Limborch principal work was the *Theologia Christiana, ad Praxin Pietatis ac Promotionem Pacis Christianae unice directa* , which contained his debate with Isaac Orobio de Castro, and is discussed later in the chapter.

[10] Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) was born in Geneva. He eventually came to reject the strict Calvinism of the *Consensus Helveticus* in favor or Arminianism. He settled in Amsterdam and a chair was established for him by the Remonstrants at their seminary. He supplemented his modest teaching salary by producing innumerable translations of and commentaries on the Bible, editions of classical and modern authors, including an edition of Erasmus, and works on history, theology, literature. He edited three important periodicals, the *Bibliotheque universelle et historique* (1686-93) and its successors, the *Bibliotheque choisie*, and the *Bibliotheque ancienne et moderne*. Excerpts from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* were published in the first. Like Locke, Le Clerc was accused of Socinianism.

[11] Historians have debated the appropriateness of using the term "Latitudinarian." Spurr, for example, rejects it in his article, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," and in his book, *The Restoration Church 1646-1689*. Others have supported it, for example, Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* and Spellmann, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of Englnad, 1660-1770*. I agree with John Marshall that it is a useful term as long as one does not expect to find too much consistency in the thought of those described as Latitudinarians (Marshall, *John Locke*, pp. 39-40).

of reason. They emphasized free will and were more concerned with morality than dogma. As a result of their emphasis on virtuous living rather than doctrinal correctness, the Latitudinarians and Remonstrants were unusually tolerant of those with different beliefs and argued for liberty of conscience in "indifferent matters."[12] Locke, Furly, and van Helmont accepted all these ideas, which accounts for their friendships with members of both groups. A similar ecumenical streak characterized the many physicians that were part of their circle of friends, such as Pieter Guenellon,[13] Egbertus Veen,[14] David Thomas[15] and Daniel Foote. Thomas and Foote were both chemical physicians, not Galenists, and consequently shared Locke's interest in the work of both Paracelsus and the elder and younger van Helmont.[16] Foote was a member of the "Dry Club," a discussion group founded by Locke that was similar to Furly's Lantern.[17] When van Helmont was in London in the 1680s, Foote acted as his amanuensis, transcribing his medical and chemical aphorisms as well as his *Memoirs*.[18] Given Furly's role as a leading Quaker apologist, such well-known Quakers as George Fox, William Penn, Robert Barclay, Tobias Ludwig Kohlhans, and George Keith frequented Furly's house. The Colle-giants Petrus Serrarius, Adam Boreel, and Abraham Galenus were also associates and friends, although they on occasion debated the Quakers. Boreel was a participant in the "Lantern." Joannes Georgius Graevius, who knew Spinoza and wrote a critique of his philosophy,[19] was another intimate friend of Locke, Furly, and van Helmont, [20] as was William

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[12] See n. 4. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*; L. Simonutti, "Reason and Toleration: Henry More and Philip van Limborch."

[13] Pieter Guenellon (1650-1722) was a physician and surgeon who had graduated from Padua in 1670. He met Locke in France about 1678. In 1680 he published *Epistolica dissertatio de Genuina Medicinam Instituendi Ratione*, a copy of which was in Locke's library. See John Harrison and Peter Laslett, eds., *The Library of John Locke*, no. 1352. He married Cornelia Maria, the daughter of Egbertus Veen. He was one of the doctors at the city hospital in Amsterdam, the St. Pietergasthuis. He was responsible for introducing Locke to van Limborch.

[14] Egbertus Veen (1630-1709?), was a physician with a degree from Leiden. He was a member of Amsterdam's Collegium Medicum. His second wife was a grand-daughter of Jacob Arminius.

[15] David Thomas (c. 1634-94) was licensed to practice medicine in 1666. He was attached to Lord Shaftesbury.

[16] Locke refers frequently to the elder van Helmont in his *Journals*. See Dewhurst, *John Locke (1632-1704), Physician and Philosopher*.

[17] Called "Dry" presumably because serious subjects were discussed. Among Locke's papers are "Rule of the Dry Club: for the Amicable Improvement of Mix'd Conversation," written by William Popple (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke, c. 25, fol. 56).

[18] "Dr. Foote's Translations of van Helmont's Works," London, British Library, MS Sloane 530. See also MS Sloane 3984, fols. 151-2.

[19] Joannes Georgius Graevius (1632-1703) was a professor of politics, history, and eloquence at Utrecht. He was a Greek scholar and published critical editions of Suetonius and Cicero, which Locke owned (Harrison and Laslett, eds., *Locke's Library*). For his friendship with Spinoza, see R. H. Popkin, "The first published reaction to Spinoza's *Tractatus*: Col. J. B. Stouppe, the Condé circle, and the Rev. Jean LeBrun." On November, 5, 1689 Locke wrote a long letter to Graevius, declaring his great friendship and affection for him (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 716-19).

[20] ibid., 3: 565.

1708), one of the less known but most ardent defenders of religious liberty at the time.

Like Furly, Popple was a merchant with a deep interest in religious and philosophical issues. He was the nephew of Andrew Marvell and shared his uncle's interest in occultism and the Kabbalah. Popple translated Locke's *Letter of Toleration* from Latin into English and wrote several works favoring absolute liberty of conscience without reservation, a position that went much farther than Locke's and approached van Helmont's.[21] Locke may even have met Popple through van Helmont.[22] Popple and van Helmont had much in common. In a poem Popple sent to Locke's cherished friend, Damaris Masham,[23] he expressed a favorable view of the Quakers, praising them for the fact that "their lives with their Pretences well agree,"[24] a point van Helmont made in his *Memoirs*.[25] For Popple, actions were what counted not dogma, a view shared by Locke, Furly, and van Helmont. Popple was a natural law theorist and argued that Jesus did not come to impose a new law but only to explain the law of nature that had always been available as a model for all men.[26] This way of thinking lay at the heart of van Helmont's view of Christianity as a restatement of perennial kabbalistic ideas. Locke was also a natural law theorist, but while he thought that this law could in principle be discovered by every rational being, he was less optimistic than Popple or van Helmont about the possibility of its actual discovery by more than a minority.

Other names that appear frequently in Locke's correspondence as mutual friends are the publishers Henrik Wetstein and Awnsham Churchill,[27] the Unitarian John Freke,[28] and Pierre Bayle.[29] To a great extent it was the very

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[21] Popple's radicalism can be seen in the title of one of his treatises, *Three Letters tending to Demonstrate how the Security of this Nation against all Future Persecution for Religion, lys in the Abolishment of the Present Penal Laws. . . and the Establishment of a New Law of Universal Liberty of Conscience*. Popple's writings were published anonymously and even attributed to Locke. His principal work, *A Rational Cathecism* links natural religion and Christian revelation.

[22] Robbins, "Absolute Liberty: The Life and Thought of William Popple (1638-1708)," p. 206. Popple refers to van Helmont in his correspondence with Locke.

[23] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS John Locke, c. 32, fol. 47.

[24] Robbins, "Absolute Liberty," p. 206.

[25] London, British Library, Sloane MS 530, fol. Hr.

[26] Robbins, "Absolute Liberty," p. 219.

[27] Both of whom published works by both Locke and van Helmont.

[28] John Freke (c. 1652-1714) was a barrister and possibly the author of "The History of the Insipids" (1669), a satire against Charles II, which resulted in proceedings being brought against him that failed for lack of evidence. He was an extreme opponent of the court and was taken into custody at the time of Monmouth's rebellion but released on bail. His radical views led him to befriend John Toland.

[29] Furly's sympathy for Bayle is apparent in a letter he wrote to Locke on 17/27 November 1693 (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 745-6), in which he mentions that Bayle has been "unprofessed." He refers to him as "the poore Gentleman" and hopes he can find a way to support himself in Holland. In a subsequent letter, Furly praises Bayle's *Dictionary* (31 July/10 August 1694, ibid., V: 96): "Monsieur Bailes Dictionaire Critique. . . wil be a book, as curious, and perhaps as exact, as we have seen—All that he undertakes is very notable, his remarks are shrewd and pleasant. it wilbe 3 folios."

heterogeneity of this circle that promoted the heterodoxy and concern for toleration that left its mark on Locke, Furly, and van Helmont.

Locke apparently became acquainted with van Helmont late in 1686, in all probability through Furly. However, Locke had heard about van Helmont and may even have read some of his books before they met, for in a letter to Locke dated June 16, 1684, Damaris Masham[30] mentions "Helmonts Opinion" of the transmigration of souls in a way that assumed Locke's familiarity with it.[31] Five years earlier, in a letter to Nicolas Toinard,[32] Locke mentions the *Kabbala denudata*. Although he cannot remember the author's name, he describes him as "un tres habil homme" and knows he is a chancellor in Germany. He tells Toinard that a copy of the book had been sent to Robert Boyle but is currently held up in customs. Boyle promised to lend his copy to Locke, and Locke says that he will send it to Toinard if the volume is no longer available for purchase.[33] In a subsequent letter, dated 15 July 1679, Locke tells Toinard that Boyle has retrieved the *Kabbala denudata* from customs. He jokes that since Toinard is such an aficionado of the Zohar, he will write out the entire long and "magnificent" title of von Rosenroth's tome, which he does with some mistakes.[34]

Locke's interest in the *Kabbala denudata* is another indication of how much broader his interests were than generally imagined. He was interested in all forms of religious and philosophical thought. While in Holland he came into contact with people of many different persuasions, as one can see from his circle of friends described above. He even visited the Labadists at Lady Masham's request and expressed his less than favorable view of them in letters to her.[35] Locke's reading was as eclectic as his friendships. For example, Le Clerc sent him Johannes Schefferus's *De Natura et Constitutione Philosphiae Italice, seu Pythagoricae Liber Singularis* (Uppsala, 1664) and suggested that if he was interested in Chaldean philosophy, which he was, he should read Proclus's commentary on Plato and Iamblichus's *de*

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[30] The daughter of Ralph Cudworth (1617-88), Damaris Masham (1659-1708) was a highly intelligent and well-read woman as well as a devoted friend of Locke. By 1691 Locke's primary residence was at Oates, the home of Lady Masham and her husband Sir Francis. See Hutton, "Between Platonism and Enlightenment: Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham"; Luisa Simonutti, "Damaris Cudworth Masham: una Lady della Repubblica delle Lettere."

[31] "If I ever did Act any Part upon the Stage of this Earth in the Anti-diluvian State of it, that golden Age, I wish it were Possible for me now to Remember it, that I might have no Temptation to Quarrel with Providence for giveing me Inclinations so little Sutable to this, and so unlike ever to be Gratify'd; Tho if I could have Faith enough to beleeve Helmonts Opinion, and Could with as strong a Fancie conceit my self to have been Methuselah. . . I think it might do all <but> as well, and I could not sure then want Patience to Compleate my Thousand Yeares either now, Or in any other Age of the World. . . ." (Lady Masham to Locke, 16 June 1684, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 2: 619-20).

[32] Nicolas Toinard, or Thoynard, (1628-1706) studied law but devoted his life to scholarship. His life's ambition was to compose a harmony of the four Gospels based on the Greek texts. This was first published in 1678 with a posthumous edition in 1707 as *Evangeliorum Harmonia Graeco-Latina*. He was interested in exploration, science, and new inventions.

[33] Locke to Toinard, 6 June 1679, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 2: 30-1.

[34] ibid., 2: 56-7.

[35] Lady Masham to Locke, 16 June 1684 and 25 August 1684, ibid., 2: 620-1, 631-2.

Mysteriis, as well as the commentaries of Psellus and Plethon on the Chaldean oracles.[36] These are hardly works one would expect a rationalist and empiricist to seek out. Locke's own library indicates the breadth of his interests and the impossibility of neatly categorizing his philosophical orientation. His curiosity about Pythagoras is especially interesting because van Helmont thought of himself (and was thought of by others) as reviving key elements of Pythagorean philosophy.[37] The fact that van Helmont visited Locke in England in 1693 and stayed with him at Lady Masham's for five months, from October through February,[38] suggests a level of friendship and intimacy that would appear inexplicable if one accepts conventional categorizations in the history of science and philosophy. Van Helmont's letter to Locke, accepting his invitation, provides further evidence of their familiarity:

> Sir,
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> I give you many thanks for your kinde lines of the 23. past and for your directions which I should have followed sooner if a little indisposition had not detained me, which being abated I finde myself able to undertake a journey in order to it. I have taken place at the Pewter Pot[39] to come forth on Saturday next [7 October] about eight in the morning hoping to be with you that night where I shall be very glad to meet The Lady and company in good health in the meane be pleased to give my best service to Her Ladyship accepting the same for yourselfe from
>
> Your Loving Friend
> F. M. V. Helmont[40]

Unfortunately Locke did not leave the kind of paper trail in regard to van Helmont that Leibniz did. It is therefore more difficult to recover the details of their friendship, though not impossible.

From comments scattered through Locke's letters, especially those to Benjamin Furly, one gains a sense of Locke's affectionate regard for van Helmont. After his return to England in February 1689, he repeatedly sends greeting to "Our old master" or "Our Friend" [van Helmont] in his letters to Furly. Locke's affection is not without a degree of jocularity. Both he and Furly were well aware of van Helmont's fixation on the Kabbalah and his ceaseless proselytizing on its behalf. In one letter to Furly, Locke describes himself "as busy as a hen with one chick, or our freind [sic] with his new disciple." Furly had told Locke about a Labadist whom van Helmont was trying to convert to the Kabbalah with all his persuasive powers. Locke comments, "I am glad our friend is soe well as to endure soe much fatigue

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[36] 16 August 1692, ibid., 4: 501-3.

[37] Notably, Herman von der Hardt (1660-1746), professor of oriental languages and librarian at Helmstedt.

[38] Van Helmont arrived at Oates on October 7, 1693 (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 730). He was apparently still at Oates when William Popple wrote to Locke on February 3, 1694 for at the end of his letter Popple presents his "humble service" to van Helmont (ibid., 5: 7).

[39] In Leadenhall Street. It was the starting point for one of the Cambridge coaches and for wagons to places in Essex (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 335 n. 2).

[40] Van Helmont to Locke, 2 October 1693, ibid., 4: 730.

but in those matters he has an admirable faculty of talkeing without much labouring his thoughts." However, in the next sentence he adds, "My kinde rememberance to him. . . ."[41] Ten days later he writes Furly another letter, referring humorously to the same Labadist, now a confirmed disciple of van Helmont:

> The good man is, I perceive, gon away as rich as if he had met with King Oberon in one of his highest fits of liberality. For, what thinke you, will it not all prove fairy treasure? and when he comes to produce it to open view, will not all the glittering gold, he goes home loaden with, turne all to leaves? All the good notions our friend has put into him, will, I fear, when he has cloathed them with his own language, look litle better than what ignorant people call nonsense.[42]

Yet for all their jocularity, both Furly and Locke were interested enough in van Helmont's theories to read his books, to comment on them, correct them, and even help to publish them. Locke's library contained van Helmont's *Paradoxal Discourses*; *Observationes circa hominem ejusq morbos*; *The Divine Being and its Attributes*; *Quaedam praemeditatae et consideratae Cogitationes super. . . Genesis*; *Seder Olam*; *A Cabbalistic Dialogue*; and *Two Hundred Queries. . . concerning the doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls*. He also owned two works elaborating on this last treatise: *A Letter to a Gentleman touching the treatise entitled Two Hundred Queries* and *The harmlesse Opinion of the Revolution of Humane Soules*.[43] In addition, he possessed J.B. van Helmont's *Ortus Medicinae* and two books by von Rosenroth, *A Dissertation concerning the pre-extistence of Souls* and *Explication of the Visions of the Book of Revelation*, written under Knorr's pseudonym, Peganius, and translated into English by Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Society. Furly's library contained van Helmont's *Quaedam praemeditatae et consideratae Cogitationes super. . . Genesis*; *The Divine Being and its Attributes*, which Furly translated into English; *Opuscula Philosophia*; *Paradoxal Discourses*; *The Spirit of Diseases*; and two copies of the Dutch version of J. B. van Helmont's *Dageraad oft Niewe Opkomst der Geneeskonst*.

It is perhaps even more surprising to find excerpts from the *Kabbala denudata* among Locke's manuscripts. These include portions of a preparatory letter written by Knorr about the utility of the Zohar for Christians,[44] five pages of notes on the *Adumbratio Cabbalae Christianae*, the last treatise in the *Kabbala denudata*, written by van Helmont, and a diagram of the *sefirot*, the ten emanations from the God-head in kabbalistic cosmogony. Locke is clearly critical of the Kabbalah. He titles his notes "Dubia circa philosophiam Orientalem" and brings up a point he makes so

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[41] Locke to Furly, 30 December 1687/9 January 1688, ibid., 3: 326-9.

[42] Locke to Furly, 9/19 January 1688, ibid., 3: 331.

[43] See Harrison and Laslett, ed. *The Library of John Locke*, items 1413-1416a (p. 152) and items 2470-2473 (p. 220).

[44] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke c. 17a, fols. 256-7. This comes from the *Kabbala denudata*, 1, 2: 2-3.

forcefully throughout his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* about the danger of using "words without a clear and distinct notion."[45] But while he had his doubts about the solutions offered by the *Kabbala denudata*, he was clearly interested in the very same questions broached in that work: what is the nature of God, the Messiah, spirits, and matter; why was world created, and why did souls fall; do souls preexist and are they restored to their original purity?

In addition to these excerpts from the *Kabbala denudata*, there is a discussion of Hebrew chronology among Locke's papers based on van Helmont's *Seder Olam*. It would be interesting to know if Locke jotted down these notes when talking to van Helmont, as Leibniz often did, or if they were notes taken while reading. Like the majority of his contemporaries, including Sir Isaac Newton, Locke was convinced that the millennium was at hand and consequently intrigued by the various calculations used to determine its advent. According to the scheme Locke transcribed from the *Seder Olam*, the fullness of the Gentiles would occur in 1702, the conversion of the Jews in 1732, and the millennium, which would follow Christ's second coming, would begin in 1777.[46] A further note appears among Locke's manuscripts on the resurrection. It is headed "F.M.V.H." and contains a passage advocating van Helmont's belief that hell is not eternal but "only for ye good of ye creature, it cannot remain forever in torment but shall suffer greater & longer proportionable to his sins & shall come out as soon as it has pd [paid] the utmost farthing."[47] Locke was well aware of van Helmont's conviction that pain and suffering were "medicinal," an idea that had provided some solace for van Helmont's patron, Anne Conway, as we have seen. Locke's exposure to van Helmont's (and perhaps Conway's) views may therefore have reinforced ideas he had sketched out as early as 1680 in his *Journal*, where he categorically rejected the Calvinist notion that God's will overshadows his goodness. In this journal entry Locke comes to conclusions very much like those of van Helmont and Lady Conway. As he says, if God is "as infinite in Goodnesse as well as power we cannot imagine he hath made any thing with a designe that it should be miserable, but that he hath afforded it all that means of being happy that its nature and state in capable of."[48] If van Helmont had spoken to Locke about Anne Conway and her treatise, it would help to explain why a manuscript copy of a poem "on the Love of Pain" written by Adam Boreel and dedicated to Lady Conway appears among his papers.[49] However, since Boreel was a member of the "Lantern," he may have given the poem directly to Locke..

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[45] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke c. 17, "Dubia circa Philosophiam Orientalem," fol. 75.

[46] ibid., fols. 258-6. Leibniz also read and in his case discussed the *Seder Olam* with van Helmont (Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 58ff.).

[47] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke c. 17, fol. 248.

[48] Cited in Marshall, *John Locke*, pp. 141-2.

[49] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS John Locke, c. 32, fol. 47.

In addition to the excerpts and notes described above, among Locke's papers there is also a short critique by Knorr von Rosenroth of the abridged version of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* published by Le Clerc in French in 1688. This was one of the earliest critiques of Locke's *Essay*, and it will be discussed below. It was written in Latin and entitled "Observations on the treatise of Mr. J. Locke on the Understanding: after the doctrine of the Hebrews and the ancient philosophers."[50]

The medical and scientific theories of both the elder and the younger van Helmont also interested Locke. Locke attended the course in chemistry given by Peter Stahl at Oxford in 1659.[51] Stahl had been invited to Oxford by Robert Boyle, and both Boyle's and Locke's writings from the period reveal their interest in Helmontian iatrochemistry. In the *Journals* Locke kept while in Holland, he recorded the younger van Helmont's cures for gangrene, plague, and scabies. [52] Like most natural philosophers of the period, Locke and van Helmont were interested in practical inventions, which explains the presence among Locke's papers of a drawing dated 1688 illustrating a device made by van Helmont for polishing stones.[53] and for the inclusion in Locke's *Journals* of van Helmont's recipes for making boot polish, preparing a primitive blackboard from kid's skin, and preserving beer.[54]

In his *Journals* Locke also recorded van Helmont's observations on the way crystals and pebbles "grow and nourish."[55] Van Helmont believed everything in the world was alive. Although Locke is often thought of as subscribing to the mechanical philosophy, he was acutely aware of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of providing mechanical explanations for natural phenomena. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he discusses the daunting problems facing mechanists: 1) How can one explain in mechanical terms the forces or properties that keep atoms or corpuscles together, allowing them to develop into large-scale organisms? 2) How are secondary qualities related to primary qualities? 3) And even more problem-

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[50] "Observationes In Tractatum Dn. J. Locke de Intellectu: secundum doctrinam Hebraeorum et Philosophorum antiquorum." ibid., c. 13, fol. 14. This is printed in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 399-405.

[51] Turnbull, "Peter Stahl, The First Public Teacher of Chemistry at Oxford." Locke's correspondence with his friend Dr. David Thomas reveals their common interest in Helmontian medicine (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, I: 315, 324-5. Locke's copy of J.B. van Helmont's *Ortus medicinae* (Amsterdam, 1652), now in the Bodleian Library, has been indexed by Locke and contains Locke's notes and marginalia. See Antonio Clericuzio, "From van Helmont to Boyle," p. 316; P. Romanell, *John Locke and Medicine. A New Key to Locke*.

[52] Dewhurst, *John Locke*, pp. 276-7, 288, 280-1.

[53] Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Locke c. 30, fol. 98: "Machina ad poliendos lapides pretiosos, [Francis Mercry van] Helmont, [16]88." Locke and van Helmont's mutual interest in inventions provides another reason for their friendship. Among the "Curiosities" listed in the catalogue of Furly's library were several made by Locke and van Helmont. Locke, for example, presented Furly with a special bookcase he had designed with "Book-shelves for all sizes of books, invented by John Locke, Esq., being very convenient for transportation without removing the books from them" (*Bibliotheca Furliana*, p. 352). Van Helmont's inventions include a chair and desk that could be heightened or lowered for invalides, two turning lathes, two wheels that could be operated with two hands, and "a beautiful winder" (ibid., pp. 348-9).

[54] Dewhurst, *John Locke*, pp. 276-7, 280-1.

[55] ibid.

atic, how can the interaction between the mind and body be described in mechanical terms.[56] Margaret Wilson argues that Locke's professed pessimism about the possibility of attaining genuine scientific knowledge undermined his adherence to mechanism. She believes Locke came to the conclusion that it was impossible to explain all secondary qualities as derived from primary ones; consequently some properties must have been added by God.[57] The fact that Locke bothered to copy down van Helmont's observations may indicate that in the face of these obstacles to a comprehensive mechanical philosophy he was willing to consider the kind of vitalistic explanations offered by van Helmont.

Van Helmont's vitalism, which was an essential aspect of his Neoplatonic and kabbalistic philosophy, went hand in hand with his belief in universal salvation, his conviction that spirit and matter were simply different modes of the same substance, and his emphasis on goodness as the chief attribute of God. Just as every created thing had emanated from a just and benevolent God, so would it return to this God after repeated reincarnations, during which it became increasing pure and perfect. Is there any evidence that Locke came close to accepting any of these ideas? There appears to be.

Scholars are still debating exactly what Locke's view of the afterlife was. In his early years he accepted the orthodox view of an eternal hell of fire and brimstone, but by the end of his life he concluded instead that the righteous would be rewarded with eternal life, while the unrighteous would be annihilated.[58] Since this was a position taken by some Socinians, it contributed to the charge that Locke was a crypto-Socinian.[59] But Locke may also have shared van Helmont's opinion that the concept of eternal punishment undermined the very idea that God was just and merciful. For how could an infinite God punish finite human beings infinitely for their finite sins?[60] Van Helmont's categorical rejection of the concept of an eternal hell may therefore have been a factor in the evolution of Locke's view of hell, although this was also an argument used by Socinians as well. But what about two other key concepts in van Helmont philosophy, the preexistence of souls and their reincarnation? No one, as far as I know, has ever suggested that Locke entertained either of these notions, yet among Locke's correspondence there is an extremely interesting letter written by William Clarke, one of the so-called "Helmontian" Quaker, who defended van Helmont's kabbalistic theory of reincarnation. From Clarke's letter it appears that he was well acquainted with Locke and that he had visited Oates at the very time van Helmont was there. While at Oates he had apparently shown Locke,

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[56] "Of the Extent of Humane Knowledge," John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, IV, iii, 29, 559.

[57] Wilson, "Superadded Properties:The Limits of Mechanism in Locke."

[58] John Milner believed that this was Locke's view. See his *An Account of Mr. Locke's Religion*, pp. 151-2. One of Locke's correspondents, a certain "J.V." or "J.N." agreed and was extremely worried that such a view "seems to disarme the Terrors of Hell, and so weakens the bands of Religion" (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 6: 127).

[59] Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, pp. 73ff.

[60] This was a point that van Helmont stressed in his *Two Hundred Queries*, pp. 125-6

van Helmont, and the Mashams the draft of his defense of van Helmont's theory. In his letter, written the following August after both the publication of his book and the attack on it published by the "J.H.," described in the previous chapter, he complains about the unfairness of this attack. But what is most extraordinary is that he asks Locke if he would be willing to write a rebuttal with the clear hope that Locke would be. As Clarke says, "I Am in some hops you may make some remarkes your selfe on this booke tho you put not your nam to the publick. . . ." Clarke even included the draft of his pamphlet on the grounds that his views had been significantly misrepresented by J.H. This draft appears to be the only remaining version of Clarke's pamphlet. Clarke's letter with its request that Locke defend a key kabbalistic hypothesis appears so extraordinary in the light of modern appraisals of Locke that I quote it in full. The reader should beware of Clarke's idiosyncratic spelling:

> Worthy sir
> I have made bould to Trespas on your patience to read this letter, and a scandolus book printed in answer to my 8 queres as I had at Sir Francis's when last with the Baron of Helmont, and I have sent you a True copy of the Queres That so you may see what answer is given and what is left out in the 1st quere, And how they have abused me and the Baron, but my thoughts are They have done that which will prove of good service, peopl are in great Expectations of the reply, which I hop a friend of mine will do who can do it better than I, (I have sent one of the protended Answers to holland to go to the Baron, I have directed to a friend of myne in Amsterdam that I use to writ to, I have for the present sent out sevrall papers in print-hand to keepe up the life that is stiring in many tell [til] some or other shall do somthing Effetialy, here followeth a Copy of it: There will be shortly printed a Reply to a Scandolus Book falsly Titled An Answer to 8 Queres of William Clarkes (Printed at Oxford) wherein theire grosse pervertions, lyes, and slanders will be made apeare, with an Illustration of the doctring of the Revolution of Human Souls: Sir I hop you will not take it amiss the Charge from Harlow will be somthing, pray pardon my bouldness, I tock care to have the Coachman payd to the Crown in harlow, my kinde love and respects to your self and to Sir Francis and his good Lady and to the young Lady:[61] my thoughts are this book might not be unwelcom to any of you, which you will see how poore the university is in true knowidge. Sir I left them without Excuse before they had printed, when I understood they would print, I sent a letter to let them know what bookes were in print that they might read them, that so they might not Expose themselves in print, or be Exposed by some other, these are the bookes I gave them an account of, 200 Queries, the prexistance of Souls, a letter to a gentlman, Seder Olam, the Ulger Philosephy refuted as the Paradoxe, etc:[62] Sir I Am in some hops you may make some remarkes your selfe on this booke tho you put not your nam to the publick, Sir I should be glad to have 2 or 3 lines from you whether you have received it for my satisfaction, but if you would give me 3 or 4 lines you may direct it thus.

[61] Probably Esther Masham.

[62] Clarke is referring to the following books, all of which advocate reincarnation: *Two Hundred Queries*; *A Letter to a Gentleman touching the Treatise, entitled, "200 Queries*; *Seder Olam*; *The Vulgar Philosophy Refuted* is a translation of Jean Gironnet's *Philosophia Vulgaris Refutata*. Nicolas Toinard describes his efforts to get this book for Locke (7/17 February 1689, *The Correspondence*, 3: 560). He was successful, for it appears as no. 1250a in the catalogue of Locke's library. The last book referred to by Clarke is *Paradoxal Discourses*.

> Leave this at William whits in Newbery groser for William Clarke, and a few of your thoughts on this booke, and I should be glad if you Come into our Countery to see you, tho I Cannot give such a parson entertainment,
>
> So I Rest Your Affctionated friend, Pray forgett not to give my service: to Sir Fr: and the good ladys and I hartily thainck them for their love and Kindness to me
>
> William Clarke
>
> Agust the first
>
> Lamborn woodlands in berks sheir within 10 mile of Newbery
>
> I do heare they at the university have sent 200 of those bookes to London.[63]

One wonders what could have made William Clarke believe that Locke would defend van Helmont's kabbalistic theory of reincarnation.

From the correspondence between Locke and Furly, it is clear that van Helmont's theory of reincarnation was a frequent topic of discussion. Although Furly realized there were problems with the concept, he believed it offered a welcome solution to many of the difficulties inherent in Christianity. As we saw in the last chapter, Furly defended van Helmont's theory in a letter to William Penn in which he expressed his dismay at the rude and unmannerly way van Helmont was being treated. Furly's positive assessment of transmigration comes out in his letters to Locke, especially those describing the circumstances surrounding van Helmont's publication of *The Divine Being and its Attributes*, a book written by van Helmont in collaboration with a physician from Danzig by the name of Paulus Buchius.

In 1691 van Helmont gained Buchius as a new disciple, and they began to collaborate, first on a new polyglot Bible after the manner of Arias Montanus, and then on *The Divine Being and its Attributes.* Against the express wishes of Buchius, van Helmont published this book in English in 1693 and in Dutch the following year. Buchius was furious. He was in the midst of negotiating an agreement with his mother-in-law by which he stood to inherit her fortune, and he was afraid that if the book were published before the settlement was reached, it would cause such a scandal that his mother-in-law would change her mind. She was apparently under the influence of strict Calvinists, the very group that, according to Furly, had already censured Buchius.[64] Van Helmont's refusal to abide by Buchius's wishes led to a law suit and an irreparable breach between the two collaborators. Furly describes the whole affair in a series of letters to Locke.[65] He agrees that the book will be controversial—which was precisely why Buchius wanted to delay its publication—but he is obviously intrigued by it and wants to have

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[63] Clarke to Locke, 11 February, 1694, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 97-102.

[64] Furly refers to Buchius as "a censured minister of the Calvinist party" (17/27 February 1691, ibid., 4: 206).

[65] For the full story, see the following letters:17/27 February 1691, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 205-8; 30 January/9 February 1694, ibid., 5: 1-4; 31 July/10 August, ibid., 5: 95-6; 20/30 October 1699, ibid., 6: 720. Buchius published his own revised version of the text as *De Verduisterde Waarheid aan het Light gebragt, en beweesen soo uit Gods Heilig Woord, aols uit den aard en oorfpronk der faaken*: door Paulus Buchius. There are some differences. For example, Buchius adds comments on biblical terminology to some chapters and a whole section on paradise. I am grateful to Sarah Hutton for this information.

Locke's opinion. In describing the book to Locke, Furly gives a very good summary of van Helmont kabbalistic philosophy:

> . . . I am in hopes to see your thoughts concerning that book of Doctor Buchius, the chieftest things are the asserting God to have been always (ab aeterno) and to remaine always (in aeternum) if I understand him aright, a Creator. The denying of a liberty of Indifferency in the divine being. The affirming the difference between spirit and body to be only modal, The necessity of Christ's being the person of Adam revolved, in order to his being the savior of all men. And of punishing al men, for the same crimes alike. These are the most paradoxal things in the book. Which are lyable to very strong objections, that would give him, to say no more, great difficultie to clear, and fairly to resolve, in his second part.[66] And therefore it was I desired your thought upon the booke. That if he can remove those objections, and establish the truth of his assertions, he may doe it. For, I long, if it maybe, to see a system, that can hold out against all objections, and make it self appear to be truth to all impartiall men that seek Truth, for Truths sake, of which number I flatter my self to be one. . . .[67]

In van Helmont's kabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation, Furly found the basis for an impregnable theodicy that affirmed the goodness of God by postulating universal salvation. Long after both his and van Helmont's break with the Quakers he mentions the theory in a letter to the Frenchman Pierre Desmaizeux. Desmaizeux had written to Furly to ask his opinion about several passages in a new translation of the New Testament. While discussing these Furly says he has always found it difficult to understand certain references in the Scriptures to rewards and punishments. Why, he asks, is it promised that long life will be given to those children who honor their fathers and mothers, and yet many of the "most obedient, sweet natured children" die young? He suggests the theory of the revolution of souls as a possible solution to these difficulties:

> there is a principle in our days newly brought tho' withall generally exploded, viz. that of the revolution of humane souls, or the Pythagorean metempsychosis refound, that goes a great way to solve many difficulties, otherwise hard to be perform'd.[68]

Furly was intrigued enough by the theory to help van Helmont write, publish, and translate many of the books in which it was proposed.[69] He also proved of invaluable assistance to van Helmont and von Rosenroth in their search for and acquisition of kabbalistic manuscripts for the *Kabbala denudata*.[70] Furly kept Locke informed about all these activities and enlisted

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[66] Furly is probably referring to *The Spirit of Diseases*, which was also written by Buchius.

[67] 21 September/1 October 1994, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 135.

[68] Letter dated "Rott. 9/20 Dec 1700," London, British Library, Add. MS 4283, fols. 264-266.

[69] Furly fits the description of the translator given in the preface to the *Two Hundred Queries*. He also translated van Helmont's *Paradoxal Discourses* and *The Divine Being and its Attributes* (Furly to Locke, 20/30 October 1699, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 6: 720).

[70] See Furly's letters in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf 30.4. He was very interested in the Kabbalah and shared Knorr's and van Helmont's millennial speculations.

his help and opinion on many occasions. The Quaker historian William Hull suggests that Furly's translation of van Helmont *Paradoxal Discourses* into Dutch in 1693 contributed to his estrangement from the Quakers.[71] But as we saw in the last chapter, Furly had been dismayed by the Quakers' reaction to van Helmont's theory as early as 1684.

Furly's relationship with the Quakers parallels van Helmont's, although his original commitment to the sect was much stronger and his adherence to it lasted longer. When he was young Furly had embraced Quakerism with great fervor. He became one of the leading spokesmen in what is described as "The Hat Controversy," during which he and a small group of adamant followers argued that a Quaker should at no time remove his hat, not even while worshipping.[72] As we have seen, this aspect of Quaker behavior was what had first intrigued van Helmont about the sect when he met William Ames in Heidelberg in 1658. However, as result of Furly's reading and association with men like Locke and van Helmont, he began to hold opinions the Quakers did not find acceptable. He also began to question their singular mannerisms—and this included their refusal to remove hats and perform normal acts of courtesy as well as their use of "thee" and "thou" instead of the more formal "you." He eventually objected to these practices as meaningless and even irritating.

A constant theme in his correspondence with Locke is the dangers of sectarianism and the intolerance and persecution it invariably engenders. The letters between the two men offer ample evidence of their evolving ecumenism and increasingly undogmatic approach to religion. As one can see from the following letter, Furly was beginning to have severe reservations about his association with the Quakers. He deeply resented being told what to think and how to behave by his co-religionists, especially in unimportant matters. He appears to have said as much to one of his Quaker colleagues in Scotland, and it is this correspondent's reply that Furly indignantly describes to Locke. Furly's disillusionment with Quaker customs appears to have been encouraged by Locke, who is probably "the ingenious man" to whom Furly refers:

> I have an answer of my letter writ into Scotland my friend is mightily shockd, troubled grieved, what deny my own Testimony of 30 years and upward? so fickle? so uncertain? fears self Interest is concerned in it. 'tis to comply for some end, but prophesyes I shall find it otherwise. All rather praise constancy, and integrity, etc.—I have answered him, this day. That I am sick of anything that looks like sectism, singularitys, and authority—That I detest the thoughts of doing any thing against my mind, for any base interest—That tis not what I thought of things one or 30 years agoe, or even yesterday that should govern a reasonable man to think so today. That no honest man can think as he will

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He offered van Helmont help in printing one of Knorr's books in Rotterdam (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke, c.9, fols. 145-146).

[71] Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, p. 157.

[72] Furly's extreme reaction against prevailing rules of etiquette emerges in his *The World's Honour Detect'd*. By 1669, however, he had rejected this position and published a retraction. See Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, pp. 11-20, 75-6.

> much less as others would have him. That I had lately been prest by an ingenious man who, discernd by my answers, that I rather defended other mens Judgments then my own, And that I could not avoid to confess it, and that I did severall things rather in complyance to others, then to my own sense. That I intended no sect, or division about trifles, that if men could leave me to my liberty I could forbeare things, which I should not perhaps, if they would compell me to them—
>
> What hele answer time will shew. . . . I have not to ad save the salutations of our old friend to they self. . . .[73]

It is interesting that Furly wrote this while van Helmont ("our old friend") was staying with him. As we have seen, van Helmont had gone through a similar experience with the Quakers.

By February, 1694, the gap between Furly and the Quakers had become all but unbridgeable. Furly makes this clear in a letter to Locke that reveals his growing disillusionment with what he sees as the Quakers' escalating intolerance. Furly ends his letter with the wish that both Locke and van Helmont, who was staying with Locke at the time, could come to Rotterdam and form the kind of tolerant, ecumenical society the three of them had apparently spoken about so often:

> Could we have your and the Barons good company, it would be very acceptable to us, and could we find, or frame such a society, as we have sometimes spoken of, and you now again mention, we should have all the content we could wish for; in the meane while, we must be content to stumble on; as well as we can, and expect what Providence will next hand forth to us; for I am fully assured that Priest-Craft will fall, and cannot stand long against that light, that has so far opend mens eyes to see through the Tiffany cover of their fulsom Authority. . . So with endeared respects from my dearest and self to Sir. Fr. My lady the Baron and your self I remain. . . .[74]

The letters in which Furly describes his agonized and prolonged estrangement from the Quakers reveals that one of the strongest bonds between Locke, Furly, and van Helmont was their fierce opposition to any form of oppression and persecution and their commitment to toleration and ecumenism. After his break with the Quakers, Furly wrote Locke an impassioned letter in which he laments the fact that the vast majority of people refuse to think for themselves and prefer to remain "In slavery and bondage." In his opinion, the words "Church" and "Heretick" are "the most pernicious words that have for above 1000 years obtaind amongst mankind." This letter expresses the anti-clericalism and emphasis on freedom of conscience and toleration that became commonplace during the Enlightenment.[75]

The commitment of the three friends to toleration and their intense hatred of persecution is also evident in the steps Locke, Furly, and van Helmont took to publish the *Liber Sententiae Thoulousae*, a manuscript describing the operations and decrees of the Toulouse Inquisition from 1300 to 1326. Letters between Locke and Furly describe in great detail the laborious

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[73] Furly to Locke, May 24, 1689, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 624-6.
[74] Furly to Locke, 30 January/9 February 1694, ibid., 5: 3-4.
[75] Furly to Locke, 26 May/5 June, ibid., 5: 62-4.

history of the procuring, editing, and publishing of this manuscript, which Furly had obtained from the Englishman William Waller. Locke suggested that Furly send it via van Helmont to van Limborch for editing and publication, which he did.[76]

The topic of heresy and persecution comes up continually in Locke's correspondence. These were sensitive issues for all three men. As we have seen, twenty-five years before van Helmont met Locke, he had been imprisoned by the Inquisition for the heresy of "judaizing." The fact that he had been released after nearly two years of incarceration did not mean, however, that he was forever out of danger. In fact, in August, 1694 Furly wrote to Locke, expressing his concern about van Helmont's safety. Van Helmont had left Holland for Sulzbach, and Furly was worried that he might be captured by the Jesuits and literally roasted alive: "The Baron is now, so finally gone I know not wither, that I beleeve we shall never see him more, If he fall into the Jesuits hands, they will treat him, as ill, as John Calvin treated Michiel [sic] Servetus in Geneva, roasting him alive with green wood. . . ."[77] Furly was not in a much better position. In the eyes of the vast majority of Christians he was a heretic simply because he was a Quaker. As for Locke, he may well have joked to Furly early on in their friendship that he wanted him "to article with the Baron that he shall not pervert me when I return again to his conversation,[78] but in the eyes of a good many of his contemporaries Locke was decidedly "perverted" when it came to his religious beliefs. Locke was acutely aware of the perils faced by anyone who professed unorthodox religious views. As his correspondence reveals, he carefully monitored cases involving heresy and the persecution of heretics. Van Limborch, for example, kept him abreast of the war that was being waged against Balthasar Bekker by orthodox Calvinists. Bekker had the audacity to question the existence of witches and this led to his dismissal from his ministry and eventual destitution.[79] Locke also keenly aware of trial and

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[76] Locke to van Limborch, 4/14 March 1688, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 393. On the history of the manuscript, see Nikson, "Locke and the Inquisition of Toulouse."

[77] Furly to Locke, 31 July/10 August 1694, ibid., 5: 95. Furly was not the only one to worry about a second imprisonment of van Helmont by the Inquisition. On October 18/28, 1698 Leibniz wrote to van Helmont, saying: "We were seriously afraid, Madame the Electress and myself, that you might have been kidnapped once again to be sent to the Inquisition for a second time" (Lbr 389, fol. 104).

[78] Locke to Furly, 20/30 July 1687, *The Correspondence of John Locke*., 3: 231.

[79] Van Limborch to Locke, 21/31 July 1691, ibid., 4: 294-301. Van Limborch describes the stir that Balthasar Bekker (1634-98) caused with this book *De Betoverde Weereld* (*The World Bewitched; or an Examination of the Common Opinions concerning Spirits*). More than 150 pamphlets relating to the book were published between 1691-3. Proceedings against Bekker lasted until end of 1692. Van Limborch thought that Bekker's conception of spirit was derived from Cartesian philosophy and was consequently inadequate and that his ideas also contradict Scripture. Nevertheless, he did not think Bekker should be hounded for his opinions and made to renounce them. Bekker is mentioned again by van Limborch on 12/22 January 1692 (*The Correspondence*, 4: 355-60) and 23 January/2 February (ibid., 4: 374-5). Locke asks for more information about Bekker on 29 February 1692 (ibid., 4: 400-1). Van Limborch mentions Bekker again on 1/11 April 1692 (ibid., 4: 428-30) and says the movement to have him dismissed is growing stronger. Bekker is mentioned in other letters as well, but the conclusion of story comes on 28 October/7 November 1692 (ibid., 4: 555-60), when Limborch describes

execution of Thomas Aikenhead, an eighteen year old Scotsman, who was charged with blasphemy on the 23 of December 1696 and hanged and buried under the gallows some two weeks later.[80] Aikenhead was charged with abrogating two Scottish laws punishing those who defamed God or denied the Trinity. The first stipulated that "railing or cursing God, or any of the persons of the Trinity is punishable by death," the second that "denying God, or any of the persons of the Trinity and obstinately continuing therein is punishable with death."[81] The English Act for the "Suppression of Blasphemy and Pronfaness," promulgated in 1698, also penalized those who denied the Trinity, although the prescribed penalties were less draconian: "whoever by printing, teaching, or advisedly speaking, denied one of the persons of the Holy Trinity to be God" should "for the first offence be disabled to have any office or employment, ecclesiastical, civil, or military, or any profit appertaining thereunto." Much heavier penalties were in place for a second offense. This was the act under which William Whiston was dismissed from his Chair as the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge in 1711.[82]

Locke's interest in the Aikenhead case is eminently understandable given the fact that he himself was accused of denying the Trinity.[83] Although Locke professed to the end of his life that this was not true, there is ample evidence that his critics were right. In Locke's opinion the only Christian doctrines that were admissible were those clearly stated in the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. Having studied these texts carefully and having sounded the opinions of his close friends, Locke appears to have concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity had no scriptural basis. This was the conclusion reached by Isaac Newton, who sent Locke two manuscripts in which he dismissed the Trinitarian proof texts, I John v. 7 and I Timothy iii, 16, as later interpolations. Locke thought highly of Newton's interpretations of scripture.[84] He was in the process of finding a publisher for Newton's manuscripts, but sensing the danger, Newton insisted that Locke return them unpublished. Several other correspondents wrote to Locke about the lack of

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the recantation demanded of Bekker by the Synod of North Holland, Bekker's refusal, and his subsequent expulsion from the Reformed ministry.

[80] Hunter, "'Aikenhead the Atheist': The Context and Consequences of Articulate Irreligion in the Late Seventeenth Century."

[81] In a letter to Locke, which de Beer thinks may have been written by James Johnstoun, the writer quotes the Scottish Law on blasphemy against the Trinity (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 6: 17-19).

[82] Force, *William Whiston.*

[83] John Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes of Atheism*; idem, *Socinianism Unmask'd* (extracts from these two works have been published in Victor Nuovo, ed, *John Locke and Christianity*); idem, *The Socinian Creed*; John Milner, *An Account of Mr Lock's Religion* ; Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Trinity* (1696). Rogers, "John Locke, conservative Radical."

[84] In a letter to Peter King on April 30, 1703, Locke wrote, "Mr. Newton is really a very valuable man, not only for his wonderful skill in mathematics, but in divinity also, and his great knowledge in the Scriptures, wherein I know few his equals." Cited in H. McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton*, p. 101.

scriptural basis for the Trinity and the sheer incomprehensibility of the concept.[85] Furly was one of these:

> . . . I pitty the poore Gentlemen that are so pesterd with those pragmatic Hereticks, that instead of explaining the doctrine of the Trinity they do perplex and confound it so, by their various and contradictory ways of explication, that those parlous writers seem to have pleasure in so easily exposing them, as men intoxicated, each condeming his brothers system, as introducing on the one hand a Tritheism, or on the other hand destorying, what they all would seen to establish—a Trinity of persons in the Deity. Which makes me despair of ever seing it, to an impartiall mind, demonstrated to be of the number of those things, that are necessary to be beleeved in order to salvation, however it fare with the truth of the assertion: For if it be so intricate that the most learned, are so confounded in their explications of it, that they fly in one anothers faces, charging each others systems with Idolatry or Heresy—sure I am there's no possibility for the simple hearted, and unlearned people, to be ever cleare in the point. And so their securest way to passe it.[86]

Locke's tacit denial of the doctrine of the Trinity went hand in hand with other unorthodox ideas, for example with his denial of original sin and the eternity of hell. What is particularly interesting in the context of the broader discussion of Locke's relationship with van Helmont is that van Helmont denied all of these things as well on the basis of his kabbalistic beliefs. While I do not claim that van Helmont's ideas shaped Locke's, it is interesting and important, I believe, to point out the ways in which Locke and van Helmont may have reinforced each other's unorthodox opinions.

By denying original sin and the eternity of hell, Locke and van Helmont removed the rationale for the orthodox Christian view of Jesus as equal to the Father. For if human beings were not innately and incorrigibly sinful as a result of Adam's fall, then there was no need for Christ's sacrifice, or atonement, or for the divine grace that supposedly only came to men through belief in him. Van Limborch was troubled by statements Locke made in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) for precisely these reasons. In a letter dated March 16/26, 1697, van Limborch tells Locke that he cannot understand what he means by claiming that the righteous have no need of grace but have an inherent right to the "tree of life":

> . . . there seem to me to occur in this treatise some things that can scarcely be reconciled with one another, unless perhaps the author[87] will set out more fully what he has in mind. On p. 13 he says that since Adam was expelled from the earthly paradise, and that on that account all his posterity is born outside that place of delights; it should naturally follow from that that all men should die and should remain for ever under the power of death, and so be utterly lost; but he declares, they were freed from that state by Christ, and indeed by the law of faith, which, as he afterwards shows copiously, is contained in the Gospel. In my opinion these statements are true. But I do not grasp satisfactorily how what is to be read on pages 250 and 266 is to be properly reconciled with them, that

[85] See, for example, Bereford's long letter (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 298-315).

[86] Furly to Locke, 7/17 November 1695, ibid., 5: 456.

[87] Van Limborch knew the treatise was by Locke, but because Locke published it anonymously, Limborch subscribed to the fiction.

> the righteous have no need of grace, but have a right to the tree of life. For they, inasmuch as they are Adam's posterity, must also remain for ever under the power of death; how then could they through their own righteousness acquire a right to the tree of life, so as to have no need of grace? Since he had declared previously that all men are freed from that state of necessary death, and indeed by the law of faith: whence it seems to follow that that deliverance cannot come about except by the law of faith. Therefore not by perfect obedience to the law of works. For deliverance from misery belongs to grace, which the law of works excludes. Again I cannot well enough reconcile with that principle what the author says of the grounds on which those who have heard nothing whatsoever of Christ can be saved. For if by Adam they are subject to necessary and eternal death, from which they are freed only through the law of faith by the benefit of Christ, it does not seem possible for it to suffice for them that by the light of nature they should have some sparks of that belief that God is merciful, but it seems that they must be saved by that law of faith which God has ordained as the condition for obtaining salvation.[88]

Van Limborch's confusion is justified. Locke does appear to be inconsistent on these points. In his *Essay* he argues that there is a natural law of morality that all men can grasp though their reason. Men should therefore praise God because

> he hath spread before all the World, such legible characters of his works and Providence, and given all Mankind so sufficient a light of Reason, that they to whom this written Word never came, could not (whenever they set themselves to search) either doubt of the Being of a GOD, or of the Obedience due to Him.[89]

In another passage he repeats this idea: "Since . . . the Precepts of Natural Religion are Plain, and very intelligible to all Mankind, and seldom come to be controverted,"[90] salvation is necessarily available to all men, including non-Christians. Locke makes the same point in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. All men can be saved "if they acknowledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgression, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest, for the future, to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned to be just and right."[91]

Locke seems to have completely reversed this position by the time he wrote his posthumously published *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*. His commentary on Ephesians ii, 8 makes it crystal clear that salvation depends on revelation, grace, and belief in Christ:

> He that reads St. Paul with Attention, cannot but observe, that speaking of the Gentiles, he calls their being brought back again from their Apostasy into the Kingdom of God, their being *saved*. Before they were thus brought to be the

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[88] Van Limborch to Locke, 16/26 March 1697, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 6: 48-50. For a lucid discussion of the issue of salvation for non-Christians, see Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church*. Sullivan shows that orthodox Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists at the time shared Limborch's view that salvation was impossible without faith and belief in Christ.

[89] *Essay*, III, x, 23, 490.

[90] ibid.

[91] *The Works of John Locke*, 6: 113.

> People of God again under the Messiah, they were, as they are here described, Aliens, Enemies, without Hope, without God, dead in Trespasses and Sins; and therefore when by Faith in Christ they came to be reconciled, and to be in Covenant again with God, as his Subjects and liege People, they were in the way of Salvation, and if they persevered, could not miss attaining of it, though they were no yet in actual Possession. . . . 'Tis Faith which is the Sourse and Beginning of this new Life; and the Gentile World who were without Sense, without Hope of any such thing, could no more help themselves, or do any thing to procure it themselves, than a dead Man can do any thing to procure himself Life. 'Tis God here does all; by Revelation of what they could never discover by their own natural Faculties, he bestows on them the Knowledge of the Messiah, and the Faith of the Gospel.[92]

This passage appears to be an eminently straightforward expression of orthodox Christian belief (and there are many other passages stressing the same reciprocal relationship between grace, faith, and salvation[93]).

Gerard Reedy suggests that the attempt to find consistency in Locke's thought from the *Essay* through the *Paraphrase* is "an acrobatic activity, perhaps prompted more by our desire for consistency than by Locke's."[94] It is certainly true that by the time Locke wrote the *Paraphrase* his view of human nature had darkened. He places greater emphasis on human sinfuness and is much less sanguine about the power of human reason either to discern or accept the law of nature. Yet, for all Reedy's caution, I cannot refrain from doing exactly what he warns against by pointing out that Locke takes a very different position in his commentary on Romans ii, 26. Here he reintroduces the idea that there is such a thing as a "natural and eternal rule of rectitude," and he claims that the Gentiles acknowledged this law and were "justified" "if they kept to it":

> Τα δικαιωματα του νομου. *The righteousness of the law.* I have taken the liberty to render it *The rectitudes of the law* in an appropriated sense of the word *rectitude* in imitation of St Paul who uses δικαιωματα here for all those precepts of the law which contein in them any part of the natural and eternal rule of *rectitude* which is made known to men by the light of reason. This rule of their actions all mankind uncircumcised as well as circumcised had, and is that which St Paul cals δικαιωματα του νομου Ch. I. 32. Because it came from god and was made by him the moral rule to all man kind, being laid within the discovery of their reason, which if they kept to, it was δικαιωματα righteousness to them, or they were justified. And this rule of Morality St Paul says the Gentile world did acknowledg.[95]

Locke is even more emphatic in his commentary on Ephesians ii, 15. Here he says that the "Law of Nature," or "that unmoveable Rule of Right," was actually already contained in the Old Testament. Jesus simply made the knowledge of this law "more easy and certain than it was before." As we have seen, this was also the view of William Popple and van Helmont.

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[92] *A Paraphrase and notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, Ephesians, ii, 8 (c), 2: 628-9.
[93] See, for example, ibid., Romans, vii, 11, 2: 554.
[94] Reedy, "Spinoza, Stillingfleet, Prophecy, and 'Enlightenment.'"
[95] *Paraphrase*, Romans, ii, 26, 2: 501.

> There were, besides these [the positive Injunctions of the Law of Moses], contained in the Book of the Law of *Moses*, the Law of Nature, or, as it is commonly called, the Moral Law, that unmoveable Rule of Right which is of perpetual Obligation: This Jesus Christ is so far from abrogating, that he has promulgated it a new under the Gospel, fuller and clearer than it was in the Mosaical Constitution, or any where else; and by adding to its Precepts the Sanction of his own divine Authority, has made the Knowledge of that Law more easy and certain than it was before; so that the Subjects of his Kingdom whereof this is now the Law, can be at no doubt or loss about their duty, if they will but read and consider the Rules of Morality, which our Saviour and his apostles have deliver'd in very plain words in the holy Scriptures of the New Testament.[96]

These two passages reassert the idea so clearly set for in the *Essay* and *The Reasonableness* that there is a Natural or Moral Law available to all men. Thus, while Locke assigns a more decisive role to Christ and the Christian revelation in the *Paraphrase*, he has not relinquished the idea of a preexisting, eternal natural law. He had, however, come to realize that the rational capacity of most humans was limited and that, consequently, revelation, with the clear promise of reward and threat of punishment, was a more certain and compelling source of morality. As Philip Abrams has argued, Locke could not relinquish the idea that natural law existed without undermining the basic Christian view of the world as rationally and divinely constituted. But neither could he deny his own insight into the fundamental subjectivity of human thought. These two largely antithetical ideas set up a tension and dualism in his philosophy, which he was unable to transcend. Abrams explains this dualism as the consequence of the conflict between his traditional education and the novel insights he gained in the course of writing his *Essay on Human Understanding*:

> Why does this ambivalence persist? He was torn, I think, between his sense of intellectual integrity and a traditional impulse springing from his education to achieve a rational and consensual account of society and politics. . . .
>
> Thus in John Locke the old intellectual order produced its gravedigger. Seeking to reaffirm the axioms and verities of the traditional ideology in which he had been trained, he found himself continually laying bare the substructure of assertion, ignorance and bad logic on which that ideology had been built.[97]

His understanding of the irrationality and subjectivity of most people's thinking did not lead Locke, however, to despair but to an increasing commitment to education. If some few human beings could think rationally and objectively, many more might be taught to, given the fact that humans are of "equal natural parts."[98]

Locke's greater emphasis on revelation as the only compelling source of morality may also have been an attempt to make his views more palatable to his Christian critics who objected to his rejection of innate ideas and his discussion of natural law in the *Essay*. Shortly after the publication of the first

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[96] For example, ibid., Ephesians, ii, 15, 2: 635.
[97] Abrams, *John Locke: Two Tracts on Government*, p. 90.
[98] ibid., p. 97.

edition of the *Essay*, Locke received a letter from his good friend James Tyrrell that annoyed him extremely. Tyrrell tells Locke that he and some of his friends fear that by rejecting innate ideas and refusing to identify the Law of Nature with Christian revelation, Locke has undermined the very foundation of morality. In the unkindest cut of all, he suggests that Locke's position is not very different from Hobbes's since he, like Hobbes, appears to make morality a matter of mere convention:

> . . . since I came into the Countrey I have began again to read over your excellent Essay; with great satisfaction; and discourseing with some thinking men at Oxford, not long since; I found them dissatisfyed with what you have sayed concerning the Law of nature, (or reason,) whereby wee distinguish moral good, from evil and vertue, from vice. for tho' I confesse in your third chap: p. 21[99] you thinke they equally forsake the truth, who running into the contrary extremes, either affirme an innate Law; or deny that there is a Law knowable by the light of nature; i.e. without the help of positive revelation. yet they thinke you have in your second Chap: p. 15. . . destroyed this reasonable concession, and resolved all vertue and vice, and the Law by which it is establist, out of a commonweath, and abstracted from divine Revelation; into the praise, or dispraise that men give to certaine actions in several clubs or societyes, by which hypothesis if Drunkennesse, and sodomy, and cruelty to Enemyes (for example) (which are not vices directly contrary to the peace of civil society) should be in any Countrey (as I thinke I can shew some examples of that kind: out of the Spanish and other relations of America) thought praise worthy; and that those that could drinke most; or enjoy most boys and be most cruel (not only) should be counted the gallantest, and most vertuous, but allso be so indeed: and so would really become subjects of that which you call the philosophical Law of vertue, since it had all that you suppose was requisite thereunto, viz: the tacite and general consent of that whole nation where such wicked customes are establist: and this you farther confirme by these words, p. 160. These three then, first the Law of God. secondly the Law of politick societyes. thirdly the Law of fashion, or private censure, are those to which men variously compare their actions: which seems to come very near what is so much cryed out upon in Mr: Hobs; when he asserts that in the state of nature and out of a commonwealth, there is no moral good or evil: vertue, or vice but in respect of those persons, that practice it or thinke it so. if you please to tell me what I shall say to those that make this objection you will doe your self right, and allsoe adde to the favours you have already bestowed on
>
> Your humble servant
> J T.[100]

Locke's testy reply is understandable—no one wanted to be identified with Hobbes—as well as extremely interesting because in defending himself, Locke raises precisely those problems that led van Helmont to accept the kabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation. How, Locke asks Tyrrell, could he have been expected to identify Divine Law, or the Law of Nature, with either the "Mosaicall" law or the law revealed in the Gospels since the latter two were not given to all mankind, but only to particular people at a particular time?

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[99] *Essay*, Bk I, iii, 13.

[100] Tyrrell to Locke, 30 June 1690, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 101-2.

> I see you or your freinds are so far from understanding me yet rightly that I shall give you the trouble of a few lines to make my meaning clearer, if possible, then it is, though I am apt to thinke that to any unprejudiced Reader, who will consider what I there ought to say, and not what he will phansy I should say besides my purpose, it is as plain as any thing can well be—L. I. c 3. par. 13, where it was proper for me to speake my opinion of the Law of nature, I affirme in as direct words as can ordinarily be made use of to Expresse ones thought that there is a Law of Nature Knowable by the light of nature—Booke 2d: c. 27. par. 7 and 8,[101] where I have occasion to speake indefinetly of the divine law, 'tis objected I could meane none other But the divine revealed law, Exclusive of the law of nature and <that for two reasons>. The first is because I call it a law given by God to mankinde—The law of nature then, in these mens opinions, had not God for its author, for if it had, he gave it to mankinde, and if he did I thinke it is no derogation to it to say he gave it to mankinde—I fear some body on the other side will from this very sentence argue that I could not meane the Mosaical or Evangelical law of God—I am sure they may with more reason, for neither of those, as I take it, was given to mankinde, which is a terme which in my sense includes all men. Tis plain the Mosaicall laws was not given to mankinde, for it was "*Hear Ô Israel*" and I never met yet with any one that said the laws of Moses was the law of mankinde. And as for the revealed will of God in the New testament, which was a revelation made to the children of men 2000 Years after Moses law, and 4000 after the Creation, how that can be cald a law given to mankinde is hard to conceive, unlesse that men borne before the times of the Gospel were no part of mankinde, or the Gospel were revealed before it was reveald. . . .[102]

Although Locke did not take criticism well, Tyrrell's letter did have an effect, as one can see by comparing the first edition of the *Essay* (II, xxvii, p. 8) with the second. The first edition reads, "*First*, that GOD has given a Law to Mankind, I think, there is nobody so brutish as to deny." In the second edition (II, ch xxviii, 8) Locke added an additional clarifying sentence: *First*, The *Divine Law*, whereby I mean that Law which God has set to the actions of Men, whether promulgated to them by the light of nature, or the voice of Revelation. That God has given a Rule whereby Men should govern themselves, I think, there is nobody so brutish as to deny. "

In a later section of the same long letter to Tyrrell, Locke again reveals his reluctance to equate morality exclusively with Christian morality. He is not as clear as he might be on this issue and ends on the rather lame note that he only intended to discuss how men "get their moral Ideas," not "the grounds of true morality," by which he presumably meant Christianity. As tolerant as he was, it was still not easy for Locke to abandon the idea that the Christian revelation was special and exclusive, although he comes close to doing just this:

> You say that to shew what I meant I should after divine law have added in a parenthesis *which others call the law of nature* which had been so far from what I meant that it had been contrary to it For I meant the Divine law indeffinetly and in general how ever made known or supposed; and if ever any men referd their actions to the law of nature as to a Divine law 'twas plain I

[101] First edition; later editions, ch. xxviii.

[102] Locke to Tyrrell, 4 August 1690, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 110-11.

> meant that if any judgd of their actions by the law of Moses or Jesus christ as by a divine law 'twas plain I meant that also. Nay the Alcoran of the Mahumetans and the Hanscrit of the Bramins could not be in this case Excluded (though perhaps you or your freinds would have thought it more worth their censure if I had put them in and then I had lain open to I know not what interpretations) or any other supposd divine revelation whether true or false. For it being taken for a divine law it would have served men who made use of it and judgd of their actions by it to have given them notions of morality or Moral Ideas and that was all I was to show. Indeed if you can tell of any other rule but 1. Divine laws or the law of God 2. Civil laws or the laws of the Magistrate 3. the law of fashon and reputation where by men judg of the goodness of their actions I have then faild in giveing a full account whence men get their moral Ideas but that is all I can be accusd to have faild in here. For I did not designe here to treat of the grounds of true morality which is necessary to true and perfect happinesse and 'thad been impertinent if I had so designed: my businees was only to shew when men had moral Ideas and what they were and that I suppose is sufficiently don in that chapter.[103]

What are we to make of these conflicting statements? Did Locke believe, as van Helmont so clearly did, that salvation was available to all men, whatever their religion, as long as they employed their reason to discover the eternally existing divine law? Or did he conclude at the end of his life that human reason was unequal to the task and only those who accepted the Christian revelation and believed in Christ could hope for salvation? Arthur Wainwright, the editor of the *Paraphrase*, leans towards the latter view. He thinks that with their "assertions about the limitations of reason, philosophy, and human discovery" the *Paraphrases* "mark the culmination of an important shift in Locke's attitude."[104] Nabil Matar provides additional evidence for such a shift with his discussion of Locke's changing attitude towards the Jews.

Matar claims that in his first *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) Locke anticipates the position John Toland was to take towards the Jews some three decades later: he calls for their toleration and naturalization in England. Matar emphasizes how unusual this position was because there were absolutely "no Christianising strings attached."[105] In other words, Locke was one of the few true "philo-Semites," since he tolerated Jews as Jews, not simply as potential Christians. By the time he wrote the second *Letter of Toleration* only a year later, however, Locke modified his position. While he continued to advocate the toleration and naturalization of Jews, he now does so on the grounds that this will facilitate their conversion. Matar argues that a further deterioration in Locke's attitude towards the Jews appear in the *Paraphrase*. Here Locke argues for the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to their homeland, Palestine. England was no longer a suitable home for the Jews, and their toleration as Jews was no longer acceptable.

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[103] *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4: 112-13.
[104] *Paraphrase*, introduction, 1: 33.
[105] Matar, "John Locke and the Jews p. 56.

Matar suggests that Locke's friendship with van Limborch was a factor in changing his attitude towards the Jews. While Locke was in Holland, van Limborch engaged in a disputation with Isaac (Balthasar) Orobio de Castro (c. 1620-87), one of the most prominent former Conversos in Amsterdam.[106] Van Limborch published his debate with Orobio in 1687 in his *De Veritate Religionis Christianiae Amica Collatio cum Erudito Judeo.*[107] Locke played a decisive role in the publication of this work as one can see from van Limborch's letter thanking him for his help in editing the manuscript.[108] Matar refers to "the strident Locke who emerges from the correspondence" with van Limborch.[109] He may have in mind a passage like the following: "I am glad that the Jew is sweating in the press, but I fancy he will sweat even more freely when the press releases him into the open air, and that he will not easily find any cooling relief in his metaphysic."[110] Van Limborch's concern with converting Jews appears again in letters describing a young Christian woman who was on the verge of converting to Judaism when van Limborch successfully intervened. Locke was extremely interested in obtaining a "narration" of this event, which lasted for more than twenty hours spread over five days.[111] Van Limborch obliged in lengthy letter.[112]

Van Limborch's strategy was apparently different from the ministers who had preceded him (and failed). The main point the young woman wanted to have proven was that "belief in the Messiah had been enjoined upon Israel" from the Law of Moses.[113] Instead of starting with Old Testament prophecies, however, as the Calvinists ministers had, van Limborch began by proving that Jesus' divine mission was established through the testimony of John the Baptist and Jesus's miracles. Then he turned to Old Testament prophecies and showed that they foretold Jesus' birth and mission. Van Limborch claimed that he had convinced the young woman that the Gospels were an accurate and infallible: "I first therefore established the truth of the Gospel account by many arguments; I next proved that the books of the sacred writers have reached us uncorrupted; and finally that the certainty of the

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[106] Born in Braganza, Orobio de Castro studied philosophy at Alcala de Henares and taught metaphysics at Salamanca. He also studied medicine and became a physician, practicing in Seville. Denounced by the Inquisition as a judaizer, he was imprisoned between 1655-8, tortured, and exiled. He moved to France and taught medicine at Toulouse. Around 1666 he converted to Judaism and came to Amsterdam, where he was circumcised and changed his first name to Isaac. On the relationship of Orobio de Castro and Limborch, see Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* and Popkin, "The Marranos of Amsterdam," in *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, pp. 149-171.

[107] For the letters between Locke and van Limborch dealing with his debate with Orobio see *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 2, letters 798, 810, 877; 3, letters, 926, 958, 959, 963.

[108] ". . . it is through your care that this whole discussion is appearing in a more polished form. You have removed numerous blemishes, you have supplied arguments that had escaped me, and you have embellished the whole work of my pen; a service which I shall ever acknowledge with gratitude and proclaim to the world (ibid., 3: 258-9).

[109] Matar, "John Locke and the Jews," p. 50.

[110] Locke to van Limborch14/24 November 1686, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 69.

[111] Locke to van Limborch, 26 October 1694, ibid., 5: 172-3.

[112] Van Limborch to Locke, 2/12 December 1694, ibid., 5: 203-33.

[113] Van Limborch to Locke, ibid., 5: 208.

Christian tradition is far greater than that of the Jewish."[114] Skeptics might well argue, and, indeed, already were arguing, that van Limborch's approach was circular: how can one prove the truth of the Gospels from the Gospels or the truth of Christ's miracles from accounts of these same miracles? Despite their circularity, Locke was impressed enough by these arguments to use them in his *Paraphrase*.[115]

Apart from doubting the truth of Christianity, the young woman was also disturbed by the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and reprobation. "[She] found fault," van Limborch tells Locke, "with the rigour of some [members] of her own [church] who had debated with her, who adjudge to hell not only all heathens and Jews, but also all Christian congregations that differ from themselves."[116] Van Limborch's response shows that he is decidedly more tolerant and ecumenical in his outlook than these strict Calvinists:

> Seizing this opportunity I set out at some length my opinion concerning mutual toleration among Christians of differing views, which seemed to please her exceedingly. I added what I thought about the heathen who have never been enlightened by knowledge of the Gospel; then about the Jews, on whom it is manifest that the light of the Gospel truth has shone; nevertheless I recognized some difference between the Jews who rejected the preaching of the Apostles, performed in the might of the Spirit and confirmed by miracles; and those of today, to whom the Gospel is often preached by inexperienced and unsuitable persons and to whom many occasions of scandal are offered by Christians. This also can be read at greater length in my debate with Orobio. At length, in order to turn my discourse to herself and to elicit from her own mouth that her eternal salvation was here concerned, I said that there are others who after they have believed in Christ have forsaken him again; such persons cannot reject Christ without at the same time refusing all his benefits and openly acknowledging that they have nothing to do with him. When she recognized that this followed rightfully I said: "This is the state in which you are now; you have recognized Christ as your Lord; you cannot therefore withdraw from him without refusing all his benefits; if, then, the Christian religion is true, you cannot abandon it and embrace Judaism except with the loss of your eternal salvation."[117]

As this passage shows, van Limborch leaves open the fate of "heathen," who had no knowledge of the Gospel, and he even appears to offer a loop hole to contemporary Jews, who only learned about Christianity from "inexperienced and unsuitable persons." Van Limborch was among the unfortunately small number of Christians who recognized how counterproductive Christian hatred and hostility towards the Jews was when it came to their conversion, for, as he suggests in this letter, those Jews who had been treated harshly might be excused for failing to accept Christianity. In his opinion, the only people who are certain of damnation are those who reject Christianity after they have accepted it or who refuse to accept it once it had been fairly pre-

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[114] *The Correspondence of John Locke*., 5: 214-5.
[115] *Paraphrase*, Wainwright's introduction, I: 30.
[116] *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 209.
[117] ibid., 5: 209-10.

sented to them. This is hardly tolerance as we know it, but it was a move in that direction, even if a small one.

In addition to van Limborch's influence, Matar speculates that Locke's growing interest in biblical studies together with his millenarianism were additional factors promoting the change in his attitude towards the Jews. For the millennium promised in the Gospels would not occur before the conversion of the Jews, and Paul clearly states in Romans 11: 26, "all Israel will be saved." Locke's commentary on this passage is significant because it shows that he did not share van Helmont's belief in the eventual salvation of everyone, and he does appear to restrict salvation to Christians alone:

> Tis plain that the Salvation that St Paul in this discourse concerning the nation of the Jews, and the Gentile world in gross, speaks of, is not eternal happyness in heaven, but he means by it the profession of the true religion here on earth. Whither it be that that is as far as corporations of bodys politique can goe towards the attainment of eternal salvation I will not enquire. But this is evident that being *saved* is used by the Apostle here in this sense. That all the Jewish nation may become the people of god again by takeing up the Christian profession may be easily conceived. But that every person of such a Christian nation shall attain eternal salvation in heaven I think noe body can imagin to be here intended.[118]

What are we to make of all this? Is Matar right in thinking that Locke became increasingly intolerant in his attitude towards Jews and non-Christians in general? He goes so far as to say that those like Locke who advocated the restoration of the Jews to Palestine were inherently anti-Semitic because they had no tolerance for Jews as Jews but only as potential Christians converts, a view I share.[119] Hence one could conclude that Locke went from extreme tolerance to extreme intolerance. There may, however, be another way to look at the situation.

Was Locke really as tolerant in his attitude towards the Jews in the 1660s and 1670s as Matar believes? If one looks carefully at his argument in the draft *Essay Concerning Toleration* of 1667 it becomes clear that he is not discussing toleration of the Jews but toleration of certain dissenting Christian sects. Locke uses the example of the Jews as a precedent for allowing a more general toleration of Christians. As he says,

> 'Tis strange to conceive upon what grounds of uniformity any different profession of Christians can be prohibited in a Christian country, where the Jewish religion (which is directly opposite to the principles of Christianity) is tolerated; and would it not be irrationall, where the Jewish religion is permitted, that the Christian magistrate, upon pretence of his power in indifferent things, should enjoin or forbid any thing, or any way interpose in their way or manner of worship?[120]

It is difficult to see any real sympathy or tolerance for the Jews in this passage. After all, as Locke claims, their religion is "directly opposite" to

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[118] *Paraphrase*, Romans xi, 26*, 2: 578-9.
[119] Coudert, "Christliche Hebraisten des 17. Jahrhundert."
[120] Cited in Matar, "John Locke and the Jews," p. 48.

Christianity, which could imply that where Christianity is divine, Judaism is demonic. Locke is not saying anything here about how and why the Jews should be tolerated, he is making a case for rational consistency that appears to me to be entirely compatible with anti-Semitism: if the reprobate Jews are tolerated in Christian commonwealths, then how much more should different denominations of Christians be. His argument that Jews should be allowed to worship publicly is also based on logical consistency and not on a belief in the validity of Judaism as a religion. Indeed, If one looks carefully at the language in which he makes this argument, it fairly bristles with what might be reasonably taken as anti-Semitism:

> If we allow the Jews to have private houses and dwellings amongst us, why should we not allow them to have synagogues? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more abominable, or is the civil peace more endangered, by their meeting in public, than in their private houses? But if these things may be granted to Jews and pagans, surely the condition of any Christian ought not to be worse than theirs, in a Christian commonwealth.[121]

Locke's attitude towards the Jews in his first *Letter of Toleration* published two decades later is the same. His argument has nothing to do with Jews as Jews; they only appear by way of example. The main arguments for toleration in this letter are the same arguments he presents in the subsequent letters: 1) there must be a separation of Church and State;[122] 2) matters of indifference in religion should be left up to the individual to accept or reject;[123] and 3) an individual must decide what is best for his own salvation. In other words, religious conviction must come from the heart not from compulsion. The few statements he makes about the Jews illustrate one or another of these points. For example, he illustrates the necessity for a separation between church and State by making an example of Jews and heathens:

> If a Jew does not believe the New Testament to be the word of God, he does not thereby alter any thing in men's civil rights. If a heathen doubt of both Testaments, he is not therefore to be punished as a pernicious citizen. The power of the magistrate, and the estates of the people, may be equally secure, whether any man believe these things or no.

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[121] *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 6: 52.

[122] ". . . I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other" (*A Letter of Concerning Toleration, Being a Translation of the Epistola de Tolerantia* in *Works*, 6: 9).

[123] "But now, if I be marching on with my utmost vigour, in that way which, according to the sacred geography, leads straight to Jerusalem; why am I beaten and ill used by others, because, perhaps, I wear not buskins; because my hair is not of the right cut; because, perhaps, I have not been dipt in the right fashion; because I eat flesh upon the road, or some other food which agrees with my stomach; because I avoid certain by-ways, which seem unto me to lead into briars or precipices; because, amongst the several paths that are in the same road, I choose that to walk in which seems to be the straightest and cleanest; because I avoid to keep company with some travellers that are less grave, and others that are more sour than they ought to be; or in fine, because I follow a guide that either is, or is not, clothed in white, and crowned with a mitre?" (ibid., 6: 24). This passage foreshadows Swift's pastiche of religious conflicts in Book 4, ch. 5 of *Gulliver's Travels*.

That such a statement implies any sympathy for the opinions of Jews or heathens is belied by the next sentence, "I readily grant that these opinions are false and absurd; but the business of laws is not to provide for the truth of opinions, but for the safety and security of the commonwealth, and of every particular man's goods and person."[124] Locke is not tolerant of other religions as valid belief systems but because he thinks the State has no jurisdiction over religion and because he was so aware of the terrible consequences of persecution and intolerance.

Matar's argument that Locke's *Second Letter Concerning Toleration* marks a radical change in his attitudes towards the Jews because he advocates toleration as the means to their conversion is not all that clear from a comparison of the two texts. In the first letter Locke never denies that conversion is the desirable end of toleration. In fact, he says that conversion is a perfectly legitimate aim of the magistrates as long as they do not employ force since force is counterproductive:

> It may indeed be alleged that the magistrate may make use of arguments, and thereby draw the heterodox into the way of truth, and procure their salvation. I grant it; but this is common to him with other men. In teaching, instructing, and redressing the erroneous by reason, he may certainly do what becomes any good man to do. Magistracy does not oblige him to put off either humanity or Christianity. But it is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties. This the civil power alone has a right to do; to the other, good-will is authority enough. Every man has commission to admonish, exhort, convince another of error, and by reasoning to draw him into truth:but to give laws, receive obedience, and compel with the word, belongs to none by the magistrate. And upon this ground I affirm, that the magistrate's power extends not to the establishing of any articles of faith, or forms of worship, by the force of his laws. For laws are of no force at all without penalties, and penalties in this case are absolutely impertinent; because they are not proper to convince the mind. Neither the profession of any articles of faith, nor the conformity to any outward form of worship, as has been already said, can be available to the salvation of souls, unless the truth of the one, and the acceptableness of the other unto God, be thoroughly believed by those that so profess and practice. But penalties are no ways capable to produce such belief[125]

To my mind Locke's argument remains virtually the same in the Second Letter: conversion is to be hoped for but never forced. As he says:

> We pray every day for their ["Pagan, Mahometan, or Jew"] conversion, and I think it our duty so to do: but it will, I fear, hardly be believed that we pray in earnest, if we exclude them from the other ordinary and probable means of conversion, either by driving them from, or persecuting them when they are amongst us. Force, you allow, is improper to convert men to any religion. Toleration is but the removing that force; so that why those should not be tolerated as well as others, if you wish their conversion, I do not see.[126]

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[124] *Works*, 6: 40.
[125] ibid., 6: 11-12.
[126] ibid,, 6: 62.

Locke never gives up the idea that there is only one way to attain salvation, and that is Christianity. He makes this clear in both letters. In the first, the one Matar characterizes as tolerant of Jews as Jews, Locke says: "there. . . [is] but one truth, one way to heaven."[127] In the second he addresses his adversary Jonas Proast[128] as follows: "True religion and Christian religion are, I suppose, to you and me, the same thing.[129] This suggests to me that a conversionist goal is an aspect of Locke's attitude towards the Jews from the beginning. What changed was not the conversionist goal but the kind of Christianity to which the Jews (and any other non Christian group) should convert. Fewer and fewer of the Christian doctrines Locke had accepted in his youth remained; predestination, reprobation, eternal punishment, and the Trinity were all eventually discarded until what was left was a belief system that was decidedly unorthodox, if not down-right heretical. Matar admits that Locke was so eager to convert the Jews "that he was willing to forego certain controversial dogmas."[130] One of the reasons Locke wanted a "narration" of how van Limborch had persuaded the young woman not to convert to Judaism was because he thought it offered a less dogmatic and hence more successful way to convert Jews:

> I earnestly congratulate you on your so successfully drawing the Judaizing young woman back to the Christian faith. I would gladly receive from you, if your leisure permits, the whole story right down to the minute circumstances. Some persons to whom our friendship was known have asked me by letter for this narration. I should like to obtain it from you, however, not for their sake but to satisfy my own desire. . . . For I believe that some want to show by this example that those are ill advised who, for the propagation of the gospel and the conversion of Jews, urge that first and foremost certain dogmas must be accepted which others, regarding them as not necessary, consider should be left to the judgment of anyone who has grown up in the Christian faith. Nor perhaps do those wander far from the truth who are of opinion that nothing should be imposed on the consciences of Christians except what is contained in the clear and express words of Holy Writ.[131]

Locke's reasons for supporting toleration were largely pragmatic. He had personal knowledge of the terrible and unjust suffering caused by persecution and intolerance. He grew up during the English Civil War and could have witnessed the execution of Charles I as a thirteen-year-old.[132] He was living in Holland at the time Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes (1685), and he witnessed the suffering experienced by the Hugenots refugees who fled to Holland and England. In addition, as we have seen, he kept himself well informed about historical and contemporary episodes of persecution. Locke's epistemological investigations also made him aware of the

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[127] *Works*, 6: 12.

[128] Proast attacked Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* in *The Argument of the Letter Concerning Toleration Briefly Considered and Answered.*

[129] *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, 6: 63.

[130] Matar, "John Locke and the Jews," p. 50.

[131] 26 October, 1694; *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 172-3.

[132] Aaron thinks it unlikely. See *John Locke*, p. 3.

limitations of human understanding, especially in matters involving God. This made him all the more skeptical of any claim to infallibility. In addition, he continued to believe that there was some kind of natural or moral law accessible to all men.

Among Locke's manuscripts is a paper containing what might have been the rules for the kind of ecumenical society that he, Furly, and van Helmont had apparently wished to inaugurate. The first three rules of this society of so-called "Pacifick Christians" illustrate the breadth of the three friend's tolerance and the paucity of rules and regulations. Although nominally a society for "Christians," there is nothing in the whole of this document that is especially Christian—no Trinity, no Eucharist, no eternal hell, no excommunication, and certainly no Inquisition. Even more importantly, Scripture is not the only source of knowledge; there is also "the light which enlightens every man that comes into the world":

> 1. We think nothing is necessary to be known, or believed for salvation, but what *God* hath revealed.
> 2. We therefore embrace all those who, in sincerity receive the Word of Truth revealed in the Scripture, and obey the light which enlightens every man that comes into the world.
> 3. We judge no man in meats, or drinks, or habit, or days, or any other outward observances, but leave every one to his freedom in the use of those outward things which he thinks can most contribute to build up the inward man in righteousness, holiness, and the true love of God, and his neighbour, in Christ Jesus.

Rule number 5 emphasizes the tolerance expected of these "Pacifick Christians":

> 5. We hold it to be an indispensable duty for all Christians to maintain love and charity in the diversity of contrary opinion: by which charity we do not mean an empty sound but an effectual forbearance and good-will. . . .[133]

One last subject needs to be addressed and that is Locke's relationship to Leibniz since van Helmont was a close friend of both men. Nicholas Jolley has pointed out that there was much more contact between Locke and Leibniz than generally believed. He suggests Thomas Burnett as the principal mediator,[134] while André Robinet thinks that Lady Masham served this function.[135] No one, however, has considered the possibility of van Helmont, although he visited Leibniz shortly after his extended visit to Locke in 1693-4. Van Helmont had also brought the *Abregé* of Locke's *Essay* to the attention of Knorr von Rosenroth, who sent Locke one of the earliest critiques of it in 1668.

It used to be thought that the major point of contention between Locke and Leibniz lay in their diametrically opposed views of innate ideas. While it is true that Locke denied the so-called "naive" form of innatism, which

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[133] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Locke, c. 17, fol. 80.
[134] Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, p. 35.
[135] Robinet, "La Reception du System de Cudworth par G.W. Leibniz."

postulated that everything from the idea of colors to logical axioms existed in the mind, he was not a sensualist pure and simple. In fact, there was a place in his theory of knowledge for a sophisticated form of innatism, in which what was innate was the very capacity of the mind to know and to process knowledge. Interestingly enough, Lady Masham, and Leibniz all believed that Locke's accepted this form of innatism. Reacting to the same abridged version of Locke's *Essay* as Knorr, Lady Masham suggests that Locke's views are not really so different from her own and those of some of her friends, who believe the soul possesses "an Active Sagacitie" that allows it to evaluate the sensory information it receives. This was, of course, her father's opinion. As she says,

> I should be glad more Clearely and fully to understand the difference betweene you and some friends of Mine, about that Principle thing, of the Souls Haveing no Actual Knowledge; Being not sure the difference betweene You, is Really so great as it Seemes; Since by actual Knowledge They say that they meane not That there is a Number of Ideas flaring and shineing to the Animadversive Facucltie like so many Torches; Or That there are Any Figures that are legibly writt there like the Astronomical characters in an almanack; But onely an Active Sagacitie in the Soul Whereby something being Hinted to Her she runs out into a More Cleare and large Conception; Her Condition being like that of a Sleeping Musician who dos not so much as Dreame of, Or has any representation of Any thing Musical in Him, till being Wak'd and Desir'd to Sing, Somebody repeating twoo [sic] or three Words of a Song to Him; He Sings it all Presently: And such are the Objects of sense to the Soul; which seemes to me Plainly to have a Facultie in Her above that of Sense Which is that that Judges of, and often Detects Impostures of it; As when the Atomick Philosophers say that Heate and cold Bitter and Sweet Red and Blew, are not real qualities in the Objects, onely our owne Fancies, These being not Intelligible Things: But Magnitude figure site Motion and Rest, into which They resolve them, We have not onely sensible Ideas of Passively impres'd from without, but also Intelligble Notions exerted from the Mind itself. Tho you seems indeed to make them but the same thing to us: And under the Name of second Qualities to exclude All Account of the first more then that They are so [Abregé, pp. 8-10; Essay, ii, viii, 9-15]. But I beg your Pardon for this, which I did not intend; not Knowing distinctly enough my owne thoughts to undertake to tell them to Another; Which in a fitter Humour for It then Any I have beene in since I received your Book, are not much Inclin'd now to dwell long on these Matters; Haveing onely regard to them so far as they may Weaken, or establish in the MInds of Any the foundations of Natural or Reveal'd Religion. . . .[136]

Knorr von Rosenroth's criticism was much the same, only couched in kabbalistic terms. Commenting specifically on book II, chapter 1 of the *Abregé*, he interprets Locke's statement about the two-fold source of ideas from sensation and reflection as supporting the existence of some innate "sixth sense," "internal vision," or "light" of the soul:

> The source of ideas is here said to be two fold: sensation and reflection. Rightly indeed if (1) the sixth sense is acknowledged or (counting the internal ones) the

[136] Lady Masham to Locke, 7 April 1688, in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 433-4.

> eighth or ninth, that is, internal vision. It may, on the one hand, be passive, i.e. perception of things communicated internally either divinely (through a dream, vision, trance, etc.) or by other spirits—such spirits are the Messiah and His spirit(s), angels good and bad—or by another soul, whether through an embryo (*ibbur* in Hebrew) concealed within us, or a *Maggid*, i.e. a voice expounding something to us, to which also infused feelings are relevant. It may, on the other hand, be active, when the soul perceives something by means of its own light—as when Teiresias sees through his forehead though his eyes are closed; and others recognize objects when blindfolded; or in sickness see things outside the house, etc., to which is relevant the whole *Labor Sophiae*.[137] (2) If the division of sensation into that which is of the man or of the *Archeus* or vital spirit is acknowledged.[138]

For Knorr sensation "is of the man," or body, while "reflection" is of the Archeus or vital spirit; in a word, reflection is a property of the mind or soul.

In his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz also attributes to Locke the notion that knowledge comes from two distinct sources, experience and the mind itself, and he emphasizes his agreement with Locke on this essential point:

> Someone will confront me with this accepted philosophical axiom, that there is nothing in the soul which does not come from the senses. But an exception must be made of the soul itself and its states. Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu, excipe: nisi ipse intellectus. Now the soul includes being, substance, one, same, cause, perception, reasoning, and many other notions which the senses cannot provide. That agrees pretty well with your author of the Essay, for he looks for a good proportion of ideas in the mind's reflection on its own nature.[139]

Leibniz, of course, wanted to engage Locke in a dialogue and for this very purpose stressed their similarities. But if Robinet is correct in claiming that innate ideas get a more favorable reception in the fourth edition of Locke's *Essay*,[140] it was perhaps as a result of criticisms such as these. Van Helmont's

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[137] De Beer helpfully suggests that Knorr may be referring to esoteric knowledge in a broad sense, including alchemy. He quotes a passage from J. B. van Helmont's *Opera Omnia* in which the term is used in this way. Knorr would, therefore, have been familiar with the term since he translated this into German: "Obscura atque difficilis adodum via, per quam Adepti, nulla librorum ope, pristianam sceintiarum lucem aliquam venari contendunt. Ideoque et Laborem Sophiae appellant" ("Opuscula medica inaudita," appended to his *Opera Omnia*, 1707, p. 236).

[138] Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, "Observations on the Abregé of Locke's Essay (1688), *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 3: 402-3.

[139] *G.W. Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding*, II, i, 111.

[140] Robinet, "La Reception du Système de Cudworth par G.W. Leibniz": "Lors de la reprise de contact avec Lady Masham, qui s'effectue in 1703, il est essentiellement question des *Nouveaux Essais*, en pleine genèse, et du Système Intellectual qui, selon Leibniz ne peut être qu'opposé à Locke. Y aura-t-il à ce propos un impact de Leibniz sur Locke via Lady Masham et Cudworth, qui aurait confuit aux révisions du livre IV de *l'Essay*, bien plus favorable que les premières éditions à la théorie de l'innéité des idées?" Robinet discusses the originality of the fourth edition of the *Essay* and Locke's more favorable attitude towards innate ideas in Book IV in *Le Langage à l'âge classique*, pp. 182-7.

Ross agrees with Robinet singles out Locke's discussion of intuitive knowledge in IV, ii, 1 as indicative of a reversion to the kind of innatism he so clearly denied in the first two books of the *Essay* ("Occultism and Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century," p 106: "This part of Knowledge is irresistible, and like the bright Sun-shine, forces it self immediately to be perceived, as soon as ever the Mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for Hessitation,

influence should not be discounted, as well, for he was a close friend of Knorr, Leibniz, Locke, and Lady Masham and, like them, he believed in two sources of knowledge, innate ideas and the sense impressions that stir them up:

> . . . no man can know what a Tree, or Beast, or such like is, unless he has the Idea or Image of that thing in him. . . . [W]e cannot frame any Idea of any thing, but what the things themselves gives forth, so that the knowledge of the Creatures is stirred up in us, and hence it is, that no man can form in himself an Idea or Image of anything, that he has never seen.[141]

It is also important to point out that for all their philosophical differences, Leibniz and Locke shared certain unorthodox religious views that were similar in many respects to those advocated by van Helmont. All three men rejected the doctrine of predestination and the eternity of hell. All three were committed to the idea that virtue and vice were almost entirely dependent on education, an idea that explains why they rejected the concept of original sin and worked hard to promote educational reforms.[142] And all three denied that Scripture was the only source of revelation. Even more significantly, they rejected Jesus's essential role in salvation. Orthodox Christians routinely dubbed any diminution in Christ's role as "Jewish," which helps to explain why van Helmont was imprisoned by the Roman Inquisition for two years on the charge of "Judaizing." The stigma of being a "judaizer" was also attached to Locke, for he was accused of being, and probably was, as we have seen, a Socinian or Arian.[143] The Arian Jesus is far more like the Kabbalah's *Adam Kadmon* than the Christian Christ. He is the first among creatures and the mediator between God and man, but not in any way equal or consubstantial with the Father.

As Richard Aaron has pointed out, Locke's extreme caution, his dislike of abstract, *a priori* systems, and the honesty which led him to admit arguments contrary to his own makes it difficult to give a consistently clear picture of his philosophy.[144] This may be the reason historians have evaluated his work so differently. John Dunn, for example, rejects the general view of Locke as an optimistic thinker, arguing instead that he must been seen as a

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Doubt, or Examination, but the Mind is presently filled with the clear Light of it. 'Tis on this Intuition, that depends all the Certainty and Evidence of all our Knowledge, which Certainty every one finds to be so great, that he cannot imagine, and therefore not require a greater. . . ."

[141] *The Divine Being and its Attributes*, pp. 18-19.

[142] In a letter to Edward Clark, in which he discusses the education of Clarke's son, Locke says he consider's the boy "as white paper as a peice of wax to be moulded and fashond," and he goes on to describe the cultivation of the rational faculty as "the highest perfection of a man" and one which "furnishes all the true light which our mindes can attein unto" (29January/8 February, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 2: 789, 790). Leibniz was equally convinced of the importance of education in promoting good morals. In his *Theodicy* he gives the vivid example of twins separated at birth and subject to very different experiences to illustrate the way external circumstances and education shape one's intellectual and moral character (*Theodicy*, par. 101, p. 179). As we have seen, van Helmont spent a great deal of time devising projects to employ and educate people.

[143] Marshall, *John Locke*, p. 131ff.

[144] Aaron, *John Locke*, p. x.

"tragic figure" because he came to realize that human reason is incapable of establishing a firm basis for morality.[145] Dunn considers Locke's legacy the Enlightenment and the legacy of the Enlightenment our modern world, spiritually and morally adrift on uncharted seas of conflicting ideologies. Hans Aarsleff takes a completely different position. He considers Locke's philosophy the source of everything that is most positive about modernity: intellectual and religious freedom, individual autonomy, democracy, toleration, and the celebration of variety.[146] Which historian is right?

Locke's philosophy did make certainty that much harder to come by. The subtitle of Locke's last work replying to Stillingfleet reveals the troubling issues his ideas raised: "Wherein, besides other incident matters, what his Lordship has said concerning certainty by Reason, Certainty by Ideas, and Certainty by Faith; the Resurrection of the Body; the Immateriality of the Soul; the Inconsistency of Mr. Locke's Notions with the Articles of the Christian Faith, and their Tendency to Scepticism; is examined."[147] As Locke's critics, both contemporary and modern, have not failed to point out, his rejection of innate ideas, his caution about the perils of the misuse of language, and his recognition of the very real obstacles in the way of genuine scientific knowledge were all conducive to skepticism. The question is, was this skepticism constructive or destructive?[148] Did it encourage open-minded investigation, rational discussion, the tolerance of different views, and the awareness that all knowledge is provisional? Or did it led to incurable skepticism and anti-intellectualism?

It is difficult to accept Dunn's conclusion and to see Locke as "tragic." He may have become less optimistic in his old age; most people do. But he never gave up the idea that men had the necessary reasoning power to know what they needed to know, and his increasing interest in education shows that he thought some people, at least, could be taught to reason well.[149] The object of his *Essay* was to discover the limits of human knowledge not in order to denigrate our abilities but to help us use them more wisely and productively. By revealing so clearly the potential pitfalls of language and the way our thought processes could be distorted and perverted by the misuse of words, Locke helped to foster a spirit of healthy skepticism, open-mindedness, and tolerance. Because human beings are incapable of reading God's mind, they should stop trying to and attend instead to what they can do to improve their own lot and the world around them. Candide's conclusion that it is best to cultivate one's own garden could well be applied to Locke. He was not a systemizer; he did not offer a key to truth and certainty.

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[145] Dunn, *John Locke*, p. vii.

[146] Aarselff, "Locke's influence."

[147] Aasleff makes this observation, ibid., p. 263.

[148] There is a debate about whether Locke should be put in the camp of constructive or negative skepticism. For the first, see van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought*, pp. 121, 124 and Woolhouse, *Locke*, p. 14. For the second, see Ferreia, "Locke's 'Constructive Skepticism'—A Reappraisal."

[149] *Essay*, I, i, 5, 45.

He was a humanist and a pragmatist, but nonetheless he did have a vision. In the passage he planed to add to Book III of the *Essay* about angelic knowledge, he expressly says that human beings have the power to come close to the kind of direct and certain knowledge possessed by angels. We should therefore be "ambitious to come. . . as near them as we can."[150] Such a statement is far closer to Pico della Mirandola than Luther.

There is more of heroism than tragedy in Locke's religious and intellectual journey. In significant ways the path he followed was similar to that of van Helmont. While he had the courage to admit that neither he nor anybody else knew, or could possibly know, all the answers, this did not lead him to despair but to a call for renewed effort. What was necessary was perseverance, humility, tact, and above all broad-mindedness. As he said in a letter to van Limborch, "I, who seek everywhere truth alone, would with equal readiness receive it wherever found, whether among the heretics or the orthodox."[151] Van Helmont also described himself as a "Seeker," a stance that seemed to exhilarate rather than discourage him. For how many eighty-year-olds plan, as van Helmont did, to travel to India to consult the Brahmins in the hope of obtaining new and better answers to life's great existential questions?[152]

Locke's friendship with van Helmont was based on their shared curiosity and interest in the natural and human world. In a word, their friendship was born and cemented in their basic optimism. Tragic figures and pessimists do not generally devise experiments, invent practical devices to make life easier and more comfortable, or do everything in their power to encourage ecumenism and tolerance. Whatever the failures of the modern world may be, it would be more accurate to attribute them to those who ignored Locke's conclusions about the limits of human understanding, claiming infallibility for themselves or their beliefs. It was this way of thinking that created to the horrendous conflicts of the Reformation. The same thinking fostered modern totalitarianism. If Locke's legacy is the Enlightenment, it is a glorious one, because at its best the Enlightenment encouraged the kind of constructive skepticism that makes experimentation, reform, and progress possible.

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[150] Cited in Aarselff, *From Locke to Saussure*, p. 79, note 62.
[151] Cited in McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton*, p. 96.
[152] Furly to Locke, 19/29 May 1694, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 54-5.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LEIBNIZ AND THE KABBALAH

In the fall of 1688 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz embarked on a trip through Germany ostensibly to collect material for the history of the House of Braunschweig, a work he never completed, much to the dismay of his patrons, the Electors of Hanover. On December 31 he arrived in Sulzbach, where he remained for an entire month. What attracted Leibniz to this small and politically insignificant place, and why did he remain there for so long on a trip where he stayed hardly anywhere else for more than two nights?[1] The answer is the presence of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth.

Van Helmont introduced Leibniz to von Rosenroth in 1671, at a time when von Rosenroth was in the process of collecting, translating, and editing the texts that would be published in the *Kabbala denudata.* As an accomplished linguist and scholar in such diverse fields as law, philosophy, history, theology, and natural science Knorr was very much like Leibniz, who was himself a polymath and very interested in languages. As I have argued in my book *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, Leibniz arrived in Sulzbach at an opportune time. From 1671, when he obtained his first position with the Elector of Mainz, to the end of his life Leibniz was concerned with the reconciliation of Catholics and Protestants as well as with the conversion of Jews and Moslems to Christianity.[2] This was the basis for his writing the *Discourse* (1686) as well as for his correspondence with Arnauld. Arnauld's criticisms of his philosophy and categorical rejection of his overtures for reconciliation produced an impasse in his thought. Is it so surprising, then, that at the very time this impasse became apparent, 1688, Leibniz should have traveled to Sulzbach and shown such interest in the Kabbalah?

The general view of scholars is that the Kabbalah had no meaningful influence on Leibniz's thought.[3] But Manuscripts in libraries at Hanover and Wolfenbüttel reveal that Leibniz's relationship with van Helmont and von Rosenroth was much closer than previously imagined and that his direct knowledge of their writings, especially the *Kabbala denudata,* was far more detailed than most scholars have realized.

Until recently Leibniz scholars for the most part have been at pains to protect Leibniz's reputation as a rationalist wholly uncontaminated by the bizarre doctrines of the innumerable mystics, vitalists, and spiritualists populating the intellectual landscape of the early modern period. This view of Leibniz was, and in some quarters still is, prevalent. Many of the best

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[1] Foucher de Careil, ed., *Leibniz: La Philosophie Juive et la Cabale*, p. 56.

[2] Baruzi, *Leibniz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre.*

[3] The major exceptions are Joseph Politella, Carolyn Merchant, Anne Becco, and Bernardino Orio de Miguel, whose works are listed in the bibliography.

known critics of Leibniz's thought have followed Bertrand Russell's lead and claim that "Leibniz's philosophy was almost entirely derived from his logic.[4] In the words of Couturat, "Leibniz's metaphysics rests solely on the principles of his logic."[5] Leibniz is consequently the prime example of a rationalist philosopher: "Thus, the philosophy of Leibniz appears as the most complete and systematic expression possible of intellectual rationalism."[6] But in recent years this view has been challenged. Leibniz, the rationalist philosopher, has ceded place to a far more complex and interesting India-dual, whose attempt to synthesize Renaissance vitalism and seventeenth century atomism led him to an open-ended dialogue with both the living and the dead, a dialogue in which he constantly tested, refined, and modified his views. This is one reason why Leibniz's correspondence and unpublished manuscripts are such important sources for reconstructing his thought. As Leibniz himself said, "Anyone who knows me only by my publications does not know me at all."[7] Like his monadology, Leibniz's philosophy was both dynamic and in many respects too radical to be appreciated until the present century.[8]

My contention that Leibniz was influenced by the Kabbalah rests on the fact that Leibniz's relationship with van Helmont, and through van Helmont with Knorr, extended over a much longer period, from 1671 to van Helmont's death in 1698, and was far closer than has previously been known. While it is true that Leibniz had a lively curiosity and a courtier's courtesy, these alone cannot explain his unusual interest in van Helmont's views. The manuscripts in the "Helmont" collection in the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek in Hanover, together with manuscripts from other collections, show how conversant Leibniz was with van Helmont's thought. Even before they met in 1671, Leibniz knew van Helmont by reputation—he was, after all, the son of Jan Baptista van Helmont, whose work Leibniz knew well. In 1667 Leibniz mentions reading the younger van Helmont's translation of Octavius Pisani's *Lycurgus Italicus* and his *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima Delineatio*.[9] Leibniz described their first meeting in Mainz in 1671 and suggests it was far from perfunctory in as much as they talked freely about a touchy subject of great interest to both of them, alchemy.[10] Further references to van Helmont and von Rosenroth occur in 1672 when Leibniz writes to Johann Friedrich Schütz in the hopes of

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[4] Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, preface to the second edition.

[5] Couturat, *La Logique de Leibniz*, p. x. For a similar view, see Child, *The Early Mathematical Manuscripts of Leibniz*, p. 11. This is essentially Cassirer's view in *Leibniz' System*. For modern subscribers to this view see Schrecker, "The Unity of Leibniz' Philosophical Thought" and Nason, "Leibniz and the Logical Argument for Individual Substances."

[6] Couturat, *La Logique de Leibniz*, p. 14.

[7] Quoted in Ross, *Leibniz*, p. 9.

[8] ibid., pp. 1-2.

[9] Leibniz mentions the translation of Pisani in *Nova Methodus Discendae Docendaeque Jurisprudentiae*, 1667 (AK VI, 1: 300) and *Alphabeti vere Hebraici* in the same year (AK VI, 1: 283).

[10] Leibniz described this meeting in a letter to Christian Philipp (AK I, 3: 442).

discovering van Helmont's whereabouts,[11] in 1676 when Leibniz mentions that von Rosenroth has sent him a copy of Boyle's "Some Motives and Incentives to the Love of God" and "The Possibility of the Resurrection,"[12] and in 1679 when Leibniz again met van Helmont at the sick bed of the Palatine Princess Elizabeth.[13] In 1681 Leibniz mentions van Helmont in several letters. Six years after that came Leibniz's long stay in Sulzbach. In 1694 Leibniz again met van Helmont for extensive periods in March and April, this time at Hanover. From this year until van Helmont's death in 1698, Leibniz and van Helmont were in constant contact, either personally or by letter. The initial contacts between van Helmont, von Rosenroth, and Leibniz between 1671 and 1688 laid the foundation for the more intense friendship and collaboration between Leibniz and van Helmont that began in 1694 and played a catalytic role in the formulation of Leibniz's fully developed monadology.

There are many reasons why Leibniz should have been drawn to van Helmont. The description of Leibniz as a super rationalist overlooks the fact that like van Helmont he was enthralled by every aspect of the material world, not in an abstract intellectual sense but as a thorough empiricist. In his view theology and the study of nature went hand in hand because nothing reveals God or promotes the love of God as much as an appreciation of his handiwork: ". . . True love is based on knowledge of the beauty of the object one loves. But the beauty of God appears in the marvelous effects of his sovereign cause. Thus, the more one understands nature and the solid truth of real sciences, which are so many rays of divine perfection, the more one is able to truly love God."[14] His receptivity to the wonders of nature made him critical of spiritualists and quietists who rejected the study of this world as worthless and even corrupting.[15] Both Leibniz and van Helmont were practicing alchemists, who avidly studied chemical processes.[16] Leibniz's interest in alchemy revealed itself early in his career when he became the secretary of a society in Nuremberg whose members were interested in transmutation.[17] Although van Helmont's fame as an alchemist was greater, Leibniz also had the reputation of an adept with deep theoretical knowledge. Like his English

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[11] 15/25 February, AK I, 1: 35.

[12] Loemker, "Leibniz and Boyle," pp. 249, 252.

[13] Aiton, *Leibniz: A Biography*, p. 100.

[14] "L'amour <veritable> est fondé sur la connoissance de la beauté de l'objet aimé. Or la beauté de Dieu paroist dans les merveilles des effets de cette cause souveraine. Ainsi plus on connoist la nature et les verités solides des sciences reelles, qu sont autant de rayons de la perfection divine, plus on est capable d'aimer Dieu veritablement" (Grua I: 91). The words in brackets are insertions made by Leibniz.

[15] His criticisms appear in the review Leibniz wrote in 1695 of *An account of W. Penns travails in Holland and Germany, anno MDCLXXVII for the service of the Gospel of Christ. . . .* (Grua I: 91).

[16] For Leibniz's interest in alchemy, see Baruzi, *Leibniz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre*, pp. 209-13; Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, pp. 135ff. For the letters between Leibniz and Schuller, see Stein, *Leibniz und Spinoza*, pp. 284-96.

[17] Ross denies that this was a Rosicrucian society (*Leibniz*, p. 5) as Couturat suggested, *La Logique de Leibniz*, p. 131, n. 3.

contemporaries, Boyle, Locke, and Newton, Leibniz hoped to make a fortune from the art. As Ross has remarked, Leibniz was apparently always an easy touch for alchemists.[18] In their letters and discussions between 1694 and 1698 Leibniz and van Helmont often brought up various alchemical subjects concerning the making of medicines and the process of distillation. Leibniz even discussed alchemy on his death bed. Much to the disgust of a Catholic critic, who believed it would have been more profitable for Leibniz to have spent his last moments worrying about the unfortunate state of his soul, Leibniz's final words concerned a report that iron nails had been transmuted into gold through the action of a certain spring.[19] The fact that van Helmont and Leibniz were both practicing alchemists reveals their common grounding in Renaissance occultism. Because of their allegiance to this tradition, they rejected Cartesian dualism. Their friendship and collaboration was based to a large extent on their mutual indebtedness to a vitalistic world view that originated in an earlier age and came increasingly under attack with the emergence of Cartesianism and the mechanical philosophy.

Van Helmont did not introduce Leibniz to the Kabbalah; kabbalistic ideas were a part of Leibniz's intellectual heritage, and he referred to the Kabbalah, both positively and negatively, before the period of his close friendship and collaboration with van Helmont.[20] Van Helmont did, however, introduce Leibniz to the Lurianic Kabbalah, and this particular form of Kabbalah influenced Leibniz's philosophy in significant ways through the doctrine of *tikkun*. As I have argued in my book, Leibniz was not a determinist. By the end of his life he embraced the idea of progress that was such a basic aspect of the Lurianic Kabbalah.

If Leibniz actually believed, as Voltaire claimed, that this was the "best of all possible worlds," and if his concept of "pre-established harmony" inevitably led him to an inescapable form of determinism, as most modern commentators contend,[21] how can we possibly explain his life-long and passionate commitment to ecumenism, education, and science? If in Leibniz's philosophy progress is out of the question because each and every created entity is preordained to follow a specific path, why was he so committed to doing all that was possible to improve the human condition, first, by working for religious unity and toleration and, second, by devising all kinds of socially useful inventions? [22] His calculator is perhaps the best known of these. But Leibniz also drew up plans for a high speed coach that would proceed along tracks on something like ball bearings and devised schemes for such things as an inland navigation system, the utilization of waste heat

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[18] Ross, *Leibniz*, p. 5.

[19] *Journal de Trévoux* (January, 1737), p. 6ff.; Ross, *Leibniz*, p. 5.

[20] For example, Leibniz distinguishes between a "Cabbala quaedam vulgaris" (G VII:184) and a "cabala sapientium," which would be useful for his "calculus generalus" or "caracteristica" (G VII: 49). Such a Kabbalah would be a "cabale non chimérique" (A I, 2: 168; G VII:199) See Knecht, *La logique chez Leibniz*, pp. 31, 73, 157, 354ff.

[21] The literature on this subject is enormous as a look through *Studia Leibnitiana* and collections of essays on Leibniz readily reveals.

[22] Meyer, *Leibnitz and the Seventeenth century Revolution*, pp. 118ff; Ross, *Leibniz*, pp. 5ff.

in furnaces, tax reform, a public health and fire service, steam-powered fountains, street lighting, a state bank, and isolation wards for plague victims. On a more mundane level, he speculated on ways to make more efficient wheel barrows and better cooking pots, and he devised a type of shoe with springs to allow for "fast getaways." He did many of these things in the company of Francis Mercury van Helmont.[23] The friendship between these two was very close, close enough for Leibniz to ghost van Helmont's last book, as he makes clear in a note in one of his manuscripts: "Although I wanted to express the opinions of my friend, . . . I have also added many thought of my own, which do not disagree with several of my friend's ideas."[24] Anne Becco has shown that in this case Leibniz did much more than simply transcribe van Helmont's ideas.[25] Why would Leibniz ghost write a book for a self-proclaimed Kabbalist if he were repelled by fanciful kabbalistic theories, as Foucher de Careil suggested he was?[26] The explanation for Leibniz's prolonged interest in van Helmont's ideas lies in those aspects of kabbalistic thought that Leibniz adapted to his own purposes. There are key issues in Leibniz's philosophy which make much more sense if analyzed from a kabbalistic perspective. For example, Leibniz's concept of monads and his attempt to justify the goodness of God in terms of a theodicy can be better understood if one is aware of his friendship with van Helmont and the influence of van Helmont's kabbalistic ideas.

Many scholars believe that Leibniz's mature philosophy was virtually in place by the time he wrote the *Discourse* in 1686.[27] If this were indeed the case, it would be impossible to argue that van Helmont, von Rosenroth, and their kabbalistic philosophy had any real influence on Leibniz because the

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[23] Pertz, ed. *Tagebuch* in *Geschichtliche Aufsätze und Gedichte Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Gesammeltewerk:* "7. August. Habe diesen Abend mit Herrn von Helmont viel geredet, wegen Erd ausbringen: ob Schiebekarrn guth. Durch motum hominis mit den Karrn viel tempus und vergebene Mühe. Praestat, hominem movere sine motu tanto sui. Von Gold schlagen. Von Braten und Kochen mit eisern Kasten. Zu redressiren, so krumb gewachsen, darinn er in Tractatu de Microcosmo et Macrocosmo, so teutsch nicht völlig sub tit. Paradoxa übersetzt. Von Drucken mit dem Fuss: mit beiden Händen spinnen. Hechel (p. 189). . . .

8. August. . . Den Hern. Helmont meine Gedancken gesagt vom geschwinden fortkommen auff Schuhfedern. Von Voiture auf allezeit glatten Boden. Er meinet. . . [symbol for mercury and for copper] sey gemacht (p. 190). . . .

[24] "<EXPLICATIO ET> NOTAE IN CAPITA QUATUOR PRIORA GENESEOS SECUNDUM PRINCIPIA THEOLGIAE CUIUSDAM SINGULARIS. Quamquam sententias amici exprimere voluerim, plerumque tamen cavi ut tolerabilem sensum recipere possent. Multas etiam meas meditationes admiscui non abhorrentes a nonnullis amici sententiis" (Hanover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS. L.H. I, V, ad. 2, g). In his transcription of this passage, Grua left out the all important "non."

[25] "Il est hors de question de penser, comme la tradition (Grua notamment) l'a soutenu, qu'il s'agit là d'un manuscrit de traduction, lequel ne nécessiterait jamais de tels remembrements de la rédaction. Les additions de création ne peuvent pas se confondre avec des corrections de sens, normales dans le cas d'une simple traduction. En outre, les ratures ne correspondent pas avec un état originaire du texte flamand ou allemand ou anglais tel qu'il apparait dans les éditions traduites. . . . Un spécialiste tel que le Professeur André Robinet nous assure qu'il n'y a aucume controverse possible à cet égard" ("Leibniz et François-Mercure van Helmont," p. 128).

[26] Foucher de Careil, *Leibniz: La Philosophie Juive et la Cabale*, p. 56.

[27] For example, Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*; Aiton, *Leibniz*; Brown, *Leibniz*.

period of Leibniz's closest association with both men occurred after the *Discourse* was written, between 1688 and 1698. In recent years, however, the idea that Leibniz's mature *Monadology* can be found in the *Discourse* has been questioned.[28] The consensus reached by most modern scholars is that although important elements of Leibniz's *Monadology* can be found in his earlier work, and particularly in the *Discourse*, there are ambiguities and contradictions which show that Leibniz was still wrestling with basic philosophical issues. For example, the idea of force as the defining characteristic of substance, while suggested in the *Discourse,* is not as centrally important there as it is in the *Monadology.* Leibniz's theodicy is also in a rudimentary stage in the *Discourse.* In section 30, for example, he mentions Judas and tries to explain why God would create him fully knowing what he was bound to do. He attempts to justify God's action with several weak and unoriginal arguments: first, that a greater good ultimately derives from evil acts; second, that the problem of evil is simply too difficult for humans to understand; and third, that evil comes from limitation, that it is essentially "nothingness," an argument often used by Platonists and Neoplatonists. According to many commentators, Leibniz never gets beyond these timid solutions and, consequently, never provides a viable theodicy.[29] But, as I have argued in my book, Leibniz's arguments justifying God change significantly under the impact of the Kabbalah, and these new arguments do produce a successful theodicy.

Most commentators are willing to agree that Leibniz's substitution of "force" for "mind" as the defining characteristic of substance represented an evolution in his thinking that banished the last traces of Cartesian dualism from his system and led to the concept of monads. In the *Discourse* substances are divided into two essentially different classes, those with minds, which are imperishable, and those without minds, which, although they continue to exist, essentially perish as individuals because of their lack of mind and memory. This difference between minds and mindless substances appears in Leibniz's writings through 1695, after which it progressively disappears. In the *Monadology*, for example, all monads are endowed with perception; the only thing that differentiates them is the clarity of these perceptions. As Leibniz says (axiom 24): ". . . if, in our perceptions, we had nothing distinct, or, so to speak in relief and stronger in flavor, we would always be in a stupor. And this is the state of bare monads."

Leibniz's use of the word "stupor" to describe the lowest level of monads deserves comment because it seems so oddly out of place in a supposedly rationalistic philosophy. However, such a conception is not out of place in van Helmont's philosophy. A consistent theme in all van Helmont's works, and one that came from the Lurianic Kabbalah, is that matter is not really a substance, only a modification of an originally spiritual substance. As we

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[28] Garber, "Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years"; Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, p. 2 & passim.

[29] L I: 90.

have seen, he describes matter as "sluggish," "dead," "contracted," or "asleep," and he explains that this condition results from "privation"[30] Leibniz essentially rationalizes these metaphors. Instead of characterizing matter in terms of "blindness," "dullness," "sleep," or "death," he translates the basic idea behind all these nouns—namely that matter represents a state of privation—into a more readily acceptable philosophical vocabulary. Monads are "unified" and "active." They have "perception," and can "think;" whereas matter is "passive," "inert," "impenetrable," and bereft of thought. While in some passages Leibniz appears to separate monads from matter, in others he seems to collapse the two into one entity, suggesting that all substances are essentially both active and passive, their activity being designated under the rubric of monad, their passivity under that of matter. This is what has led several scholars to argue that Leibniz moved from the realist position that matter actually exists to the phenomenalist position that it does not.[31]

In their books on Leibniz, Donald Rutherford and Robert Adams discuss the nature of monads and their relationship to corporeal matter. According to both authors monads contain within themselves both active and passive forces: the active force consists of the entelechy or soul of the monad, while the passive force comprises the primary matter. Leibniz makes this point in a letter to Burnett, in which he describes "the complete corporeal substance" as that "which is completely constituted by two constituents, the active principle, and the passive principle, the former of which is called form, soul, entelechy, primitive force, and the second called primary matter, solidity, resistance."[32] But as we know, Leibniz considered monads to be unified and indivisible, and because they were indivisible, they were immaterial, inasmuch as Leibniz defined matter as infinitely divisible. The question immediately arises as to how a unified, immaterial substance can have any relationship to infinitely divisible material substances. How, in other words, can monads be the source of matter? If one takes Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony literally, it would appear that monads cannot be the

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[30] "Ad Fundamenta Cabbalae Aëto-Paedo-Melissaeae Dialogus": "Materia, quâ talis non est spiritus; sed illa ipsa tantum substantia, quae sub formâ materiae apparet, in caecitate nimirum & quiete illa, atq; privatione prioris felicitatis, aliquando spiritus fuisse, & adhuc fundamentaliter & radicaliter talis esse, & talis aliquando iterum fore formaliter, diceretur . . . materiam *factam* statuerem è coalitione monadum spiritualium torpentium. . . [p. 311] quippe cjus definitionem ne unicus quidem terminus positivus jure meritò ingredi debet. . . ." (*KD*, I, 2: 310-11).

[31] For example, see Garber, who argues that Leibniz moved from a realist to phenomenalist position in "Leibniz and the Foundation of Physics." Sleigh argues for a consistent ambiguity in Leibniz's position, as does Wilson (*Leibniz's Metaphysics*, p. 67). Rutherford contends that Leibniz was a realist until the very end of his life. See his "Phenomenalism and the Reality of Body in Leibniz's Later Philosophy" and his book *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (see especially ch. 8-10). Aiton disagrees and believes that Leibniz rejected phenomenology at the end of his life (*Leibniz*, p. 325). For an overview of the subject from opposite points of view see Jolley, "Leibniz and Phenomenalism" ("Leibniz never did more than flirt with phenomenalism," p. 51) and Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, which offers a correction of his earlier paper, "Phenomenalism and Corporeal substance in Leibniz."

[32] G III: 227.

source of matter nor can they have any causal connection to matter whatsoever. But as Adams has made very clear, Leibniz repeatedly asserts the impossible, namely that monads are the source of matter and monads and matter do influence each other. He quotes Leibniz to the effect that the primary matter within monads, while not divisible in itself is "the principle of divisibility" and hence the source of the extended body.[33] On numerous occasions Leibniz asserts that monads are never without bodies. As Rutherford says, "It is a fundamental tenet of Leibniz's mature philosophy, defended until the end of his life, that no created monad ever exists completely detached from an organic body."[34] Adams concurs and takes the argument one step farther by directly relating the existence of corporeal bodies to the primary matter of the monad: ". . . for Leibniz a substance's possession of primary matter is connected with its possession of an organic body. That Leibniz believed in this connection is clear."[35] The reason for this connection is less clear, although Adams explains it as the result of the confused perceptions within monads arising from their primary matter or primitive passive force. Created souls or monads are inseparable from bodies inasmuch as bodies represent the limitation distinguishing creatures from their creator. Only God, who is absolutely perfect and perceives everything perfectly without any distinct point of view, is bodiless. Thus, towards the end of his life Leibniz can make the startling statement—startling in a Christian context—that imperfection is part of the very nature of being a creature and precedes sin: "there is *an original imperfection in the creature* before sin, because the creature is limited in its essence; whence ensues that it cannot know all, and that it can deceive itself and commit other errors."[36] This is not a view that fits with orthodox Christian notions of original sin and individual accountability; it is, however, a perfectly acceptable gnostic, Neoplatonic and kabbalistic view and one which provides the basis for the optimism of Leibniz's final theodicy.

In a recent article Stuart Brown argues that van Helmont's kabbalistic idea that matter originated from the clinging together of increasingly imperfect monads does not accord with Leibniz's notion of bodies as aggregates since Leibniz's material aggregates are formed from a collection of "real beings."[37] I would argue, however, that if we follow the indirect route excavated by Adams, there is indeed a similarity between van Helmont's kabbalistic concept of matter and Leibniz's. In both cases immaterial, soul-like substances have produced what appears to be matter, but this matter remains essentially soul-like or monadic. Given the example of God as a

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[33] Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 347-8.

[34] Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, p. 193; cf. GP VI: 545-6/L: 590.

[35] Adams, *Leibniz*, p. 363.

[36] *Theodicy*, par. 20, p. 135.

[37] Brown, "Some Occult Influences on Leibniz's Monadology," pp. 13-14. It is gratifying to see that Brown has rejected his earlier position that van Helmont's and Leibniz's ideas simply "converged" in favor of the view that van Helmont's opinions may have "confirmed" Leibniz's. For his earlier position, see Brown, "Leibniz and More's Cabbalistic Circle," pp. 77-95.

perfect and hence bodiless monad, there is the distinct implication that the more perfect and unlimited monads become, the more immaterial they will be. To my mind, this way of thinking is characteristic of the kind of kabbalistic world view Leibniz discussed with Knorr von Rosenroth on his trip to Sulzbach in 1688 and that he continued to discuss with van Helmont often and at length from 1694 until van Helmont's death in 1698. Stuart Brown suggests Plotinus as a more direct source for Leibniz than van Helmont or the Lurianic Kabbalah.[38] But this overlooks the fact that the Kabbalah had absorbed Neoplatonic influences to such a point that Luria, like Plotinus, conceived of matter as a principle of limitation and imperfection, just as van Helmont and Leibniz did.

Brown's assertion that material beings were "real beings" for Leibniz again raises the vexed issue of whether Leibniz was a realist or phenomenalist. The fact that scholars can disagree so radically about such a basic aspect of Leibniz's philosophy might suggest that there is no simple "yes" or "no" answer.[39] The solution I propose is that Leibniz was neither a realist nor a phenomenalist, but a philosopher who had absorbed many Neoplatonic and kabbalistic ideas, the most important of which was that soul (or mind) and matter are opposite ends of a continuum. Soul represents activity, while matter is simply a term for whatever impedes or hinders this activity. Matter is therefore essentially a passive force, a negation of reality, rather than anything real in itself. This position was a basic aspect of van Helmont's kabbalistic thought, but it could also be interpreted as a return to the original philosophy of Aristotle, before the Scholastics interpreted him in the light of Christian mind-body dualism. For unlike Platonic or Christian vitalism, Aristotelian vitalism is not dualistic, since the form of an entity (the immanent pattern or essence that brings potentiality to actuality) is inseparable from it.[40] I realize that Robert Adams has specifically argued against the idea that Leibniz accepted the one-substance theory of Aristotle,[41] but I would counter that Leibniz did accept it but in the modified form presented in the work of Jan Baptista van Helmont.

The similarities between Leibniz's monads and J.B. van Helmont's concept of substance have been pointed out by Walter Pagel. For the elder van Helmont spirit and matter are "the two convertible faces of the same coin, the individual unit, in which they are inseparably interwoven. The spirit is not additional but intrinsic to the body of the object."[42] Leibniz notion of a monad as containing "active" and "passive" forces is extraordinarily similar; the only real difference is in terminology. Following Aristotle, the elder van Helmont believed that there was a principle within each material object that determined its life history. Aristotle had called this the "form." Borrowing

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[38] Brown, "Some Occult Influences," p. 14. On p. 7, however, Brown suggested that at best Plotinus could only have been an indirect influence.

[39] On this issue see n. 11.

[40] Hein, "The Endurance of the Mechanism-Vitalism Controversy," p. 170.

[41] Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 267ff.

[42] Pagel, *Joan Baptista van Helmont: Reformer of Science and Medicine*, p. 10.

from the vocabulary of Paracelsus, van Helmont preferred the term *archeus*, which he described as:

> the seminal efficient cause containeth the Types or Patterns of things to be done by itself, the figure, motions, houre, respects, inclinations, fitnesses, equalizings, proportions, alienation, defect, and whatsoever falls in under the succession of dayes, as well as in the business of generation, as of government.[43]

The similarity of this idea with Leibniz's notion of monads as completely self-motiviating hardly needs to be stressed. But it is worth pointing out that in appropriating the term *archeus* from Paracelsus, van Helmont followed him in thinking that complex organisms like the human body contained many *archei*, one for each organ, distinct part, or limb. In describing how this worked in practice both van Helmont and Paracelsus used the analogy of soldiers under a general. Leibniz used similar analogies to describe the relationship between the innumerable monads within a single organism.

Both Aiton and Brown suggest that the alchemical belief that every substance contains a seminal core or "flower," which can be reconstituted even from ashes, could have influenced Leibniz in the formulation of his *Monadology*.[44] But there is one single source for all these variations on the single theme of the convertibility of spirit and matter: Francis Mercury van Helmont. Van Helmont was a practicing alchemist and a Lurianic Kabbalist, but he was also the disciple of his father, who, as we have seen, advocated a form of Aristotelian monism. Thus, the changes in Leibniz's concept of substance remarked upon by scholars as occurring in the 1690s and which have been identified as a move towards phenomenalism could conceivably have been encouraged by Leibniz's association with the younger van Helmont.

Some scholars have simply concluded that it is impossible to decide what Leibniz's conception of matter is, that his statements on the subject vary so dramatically over time that consensus is impossible. As L.J. Russell remarks:

> *entelechy, materia prima, materia secunda*: *vis primitiva*, being modified by *materia prima* and producing complete substance or *materia secunda* which possesses *vis derivativa* and motion: while yet *entelechy* develops by itself independently of *materia secunda* and *materia secunda* develops independently of *entelechy*, and yet *entelechy* acts on *materia secunda* and is the source of the mass and the forces in it—how on earth can we get all this into one consistent picture? [45]

For all the apparent confusion, these various statements are consistent if viewed from a kabbalistic perspective. Is the following statement by Leibniz really so different from the one made by van Helmont and quoted above, in which he denies that matter "strictly considered. . . exists in itself"?

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[43] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 29

[44] See Brown, "Some Occult Influences," pp. 8ff.

[45] Russell, "The Correspondence between Leibniz and de Volder."

> Indeed I do not take away body, but I reduce it to what it is, for I show that corporeal mass . . . is not a substance but a phenomenon resulting from simple substances which alone have unity and absolute reality.[46]

There is a further area in which kabbalistic ideas may have influenced Leibniz, and that concerns the perplexing question of how monads interact. This should have been settled once and for all by Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony, which ostensibly eliminates any possibility of a real causal connection. But, then, how is one to deal with other statements in which Leibniz implies that mater and monads interact?

In an interesting and insightful article Lois Frankel points out that it is difficult for the modern reader to comprehend Leibniz's concept of causation because we use different models which ultimately derive from Hume.[47] Where we tend to think of causation in terms of a relation between events, philosophers in earlier centuries viewed causation in the much broader terms of the qualities, essences, and powers of substances acting upon each other on different levels of ontological and epistemological reality. Thus, for Leibniz, God acts in one way, monads in another, and physical bodies in still another way. Yet, as Frankel points out, all these different forms of interaction are analogous.

In the case of God, Leibniz employs two models of causation: emanation and volition. The emanation model is a basic aspect of Platonic, Neoplatonic and kabbalistic theory, according to which God created the universe through a process of emanation, or radiation, without diminishing his essence in any way. In this theory of causation a higher form, or idea (to use Plato's terminology), provides the model or mirror from which the various effects takes their being. Causation of this kind is often described in metaphors of flowing fountains, mirrors, or fulgurations of light. Leibniz uses this last metaphor in section 47 of the *Monadology*:

> Thus God alone is the primitive unity or the first simple substance; all created or derivative monads are products, and are generated, so to speak, by continual fulgurations of the divinity from moment to moment, limited by the receptivity of the creature, to which it is essential to be limited.

Although Leibniz employed the emanation model, according to Frankel "the basic model of Leibnizian causation" is that of volition.[48] This model appears throughout his writings, from the earliest to the latest. For example, in a letter to Thomasius in 1669, Leibniz says, "mind is the principle of all motion, as Aristotle rightly saw."[49] In the *New Essays* he says much the same thing: ". . . the clearest idea of active power comes to us from the mind. So active power occurs only in things which are analogous to mind, that is, in

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[46] Letter to de Volder, G II: 275: "Ego vero non tollo corupus, sed ad id quod est revoco, massam enim corpoream quae aliquid praeter substantias simplices habere creditur, non substantiam esse ostendo, sed phaenomenon resultans ex substantiis simplicibus quae solae unitatem et absolutam realitatem habent."

[47] Frankel, "Causation, Harmony, and Analogy," p. 58.

[48] ibid., p. 64.

[49] Cited in ibid., p. 61 [G IV: 170]

entelechies; for strictly matter exhibits only passive power."[50] The emanation and volitional models of causation apply to God and to a lesser extent to monads, while a mechanical model applies to physical bodies. But, as Frankel points out, all these models are analogous because at the basis of them all is the volitional model. For example, when Leibniz speaks of "force" in the physical world, he equates it with "conatus" or "striving," terms that have a great deal in common with the notion that monads have "appetite" and "desire."[51] Thus, according to Frankel's suggestive interpretation, the pre-established harmony does not refer to two utterly distinct and incompatible realms; it simply describes analogous modes of causation viewed from different perspectives.

Frankel's discussion of Leibnizian causation offers an Ariadne's thread through the labyrinth of the continuum between physical bodies and spiritual monads; physical bodies are monads, simply viewed from a different perspective and situated on a different plane of reality. This is the conclusion reached by Rutherford and Adams as well. Rutherford clarifies the issue by stressing the Platonic roots of Leibniz's notions of causality: monads and matter belong to two distinct epistemological realms, the intellect and the senses: "Given that intellection and sensation represent two different ways of knowing one and the same world, there is no contradiction in claiming that everything at once occurs mechanically and vitally."[52]

Following Pagel's lead I have already suggested the important similarities between Leibniz's concept of monads and the elder van Helmont's view of matter. The ideas of the elder van Helmont are also relevant in connection with Leibniz's concept of causality. The troubling question of how form could effect body, or spirit matter, which eventually led Leibniz to his theory of pre-established harmony, had led the elder van Helmont to a remarkably similar idea at an earlier date. He too denied that matter and spirit could mutually interact. The younger van Helmont agreed. Both father and son were convinced that any change that occurs when two or more bodies appear to interact results from the interaction of the *archei*, which, because they are not material, act on each other through ideas.[53]

In J.B. van Helmont's universe all the basic units of matter are endowed with perception, and some even possess sense and intellect. Pagel describes this concept of matter in a way that underlines its similarity to Leibniz's: "In other words, the world consisted of enmattered psychoid impulses that were intrinsic, rather than superadded to matter."[54] Pagel's use of the word "psychoid" is suggestive, for while many scholars have remarked on the "pansychism" characteristic of Leibniz's monadology, few have looked for the source of this in the thought of the two van Helmonts.

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[50] *NE* ii, xxi; quoted in ibid.
[51] Frankel, "Causation, Harmony, and Analogy," p. 65.
[52] Rutherford, *Leibniz*, p. 217. For a similar analysis, see Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 287, 366, 386.
[53] J.B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, p. 536; see ch. 1.
[54] Pagel, *Joan Baptista van Helmont*, p. 36.

In 1697, the same year in which he ghosted van Helmont's last book, Leibniz wrote a short treatise entitled *On the Radical Origination of Things*. The last paragraph of this work is extremely interesting because it echoes van Helmont's idea that matter is simply spirit which has become "sluggish" or fallen "asleep." As Leibniz says:

> Many substances have already attained great perfection. However, because of the infinite divisibility of the continuum, there are always parts asleep in the abyss of things, yet to be roused and yet to be advanced to greater and better things, advanced, in a word, to greater cultivation. Thus, progress never comes to an end.[55]

The idea that substances can be "aroused" and can "develop" and that consequently progress never comes to an end seems to be dramatically at odds with the usual picture of Leibniz as advocating that this present world is the best possible. This was the idea so mercilessly ridiculed by Voltaire in the character of Dr. Pangloss. But Voltaire's witty diatribe misses the mark because Leibniz's thought evolved over time to the point that he came to think this world the best possible because it has the capacity to become increasingly better. Although Leibniz continued to trot out the old and tired arguments that sin and evil are simply a result of privation or that they somehow contribute to the greater good, by the end of his life he accepted the radical kabbalistic idea of *tikkun* and consequently believed that every created thing would eventually reach a state of perfection as a result of repeated transformations.[56] The idea that each single created thing will ultimately reach perfection does not appear in the *Discourse,* but it does appear in *On the Radical Origination of Things* and even more clearly in unpublished documents written by Leibniz between 1694 and 1715.

In his published writings Leibniz never comes out and explicitly says that the world will be restored to its prelapsarian state or that every created thing will eventually be saved, as Isaac Luria, von Rosenroth, and van Helmont did. He was, after all, trying to create consensus in an age of bitter sectarian conflict, and such opinions smacked too much of radicalism. As D.P. Walker has shown, even people who denied the eternity of hell were not sure it should be broadcast to the lower classes, for whom the threat of hell was the only certain stimulus to virtue.[57] But the ideas of progress and perfectionism are to be found liberally scattered through Leibniz's writings, especially after 1697, largely because of the influence of van Helmont.

The great change in Leibniz's thinking about the possibility of progress becomes abundantly clear if one compares passages from the four manuscripts published by Michel Fichant, in which Leibniz discusses progress and

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[55] *G.W. Leibniz: Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, p. 48.

[56] In his article "Leibniz und der Pietismus," Baumgart argues that Leibniz believed in the perfectibility of man and draws a parallel between this aspect of Leibniz's philosophy and the pietism of August Hermann Francke.The missing link in this accurate picture is the Kabbalah.

[57] Walker, *The Decline of Hell.*

the possibility of *apocatastasis*, Origen's concept of universal salvation.[58] The very title of first manuscript written in 1693, *Concerning the Horizon of Human Knowledge,* makes it immediately clear that at this point Leibniz believes there is a limit to the human ability to change and progress. By 1701, however, Leibniz had changed his mind, arguing that men will continue to discover new things, and thus progress will never stop.[59] By 1715, when the last two documents quoted by Fichant were written, Leibniz fully accepted the inevitability of progress.[60] Fichant describes the last text as advocating a "quasi-Origenism."[61]

In accounting for Leibniz's change of view, Fichant looks primarily to the influence of Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649-1727), the Lutheran theologian and minister, who caused such consternation among many of his co-religionists because of his millenarianism and belief in universal salvation.[62] Fichant traces Leibniz's relationship with Petersen and shows that Leibniz took an active hand in planning and correcting the philosophical poem in which Petersen advocates universal salvation, *Uranias seu opera Dei magna carmine heroico celebrata* (published five years after Leibniz's death). In 1706, fourteen years before this work appeared, Leibniz had scribbled an outline of its contents on the back of a letter Petersen had written to him. It is worth quoting this draft in full because it so clearly indicates that by this date Leibniz fully accepted the doctrine of universal salvation, even though he was unwilling to advocate it publicly:

> I, who am accustomed to thinking often about how the talents of great men might serve to advance the public good to the greatest degree, see that what I have often hoped for might come from you, namely a fit and comprehensive work about divine matters in the form of a heroic poem. For theology, which shines forth in prose, would be even more sublime if dressed in Virgilian majesty, which you of all people could do best. This would be the subject of such a great work: first, God, sufficient in his perpetual and secret eternity; then the creation of the cosmos; and finally the workings of providence in the governing of the world. But the second part should treat the future as it pertains to the body and the soul. Here the purification of souls and the restitution of all things, or rather their gradual improvement and elevation, could be discussed. I hope that the last, but not the least, part of the work will concern the grandeur of the celestial kingdom, or, as I call it, the divine court. There the astonishing virtues of the angels should be depicted in vivid colors and the happiness of blessed souls celebrated, blessed souls, who not only see the world under our

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[58] Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaines.* . . . These texts are discussed more fully in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, chs. 5-6..

[59] Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaines*, pp. 56ff; Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, pp. 113-4.

[60] Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaines*, pp. 74ff.

[61] ibid., p. 173.

[62] Petersen was born in Lübeck. He studied in Giessen, Rostock, Leipzig, Wittenberg, and Jena. He met Philipp Jacob Spener, one of the founders of the Pietist movement, in 1675. In 1680 he married Johanna Eleonore von und zu Merlau. With her he embraced millenarianism, which led Lutheran officials in Celle to remove him from his position in Lüneburg as superintendent of Churches. After reading the works of van Helmont, Anne Conway, and Jane Leade (1623-1704), an English mystic and follower of Boehme, Petersen and his wife accepted the doctrine of *apocatastasis*, or universal salvation, both publishing books in support of it.

> feet but innumerable other worlds. From the different scenes of divine wisdom and goodness throughout the ages the love and veneration for the supreme mind will burn ever more brightly. Here is the holy place for the most elegant fictions, although there is nothing that can be imagined by us, however beautiful, that is not surpassed by the truth. I do not know anyone from whom one could hope for such a work aside from you, you who have the gift of divine eloquence and to whom the hidden recesses of divine matters are visible.[63]

Five years later, in 1711, Petersen actually began work on the poem and Leibniz played a vital role in its execution, going so far as to correct Petersen's poetry. Leibniz's favorable attitude towards Petersen's theory of universal restitution went back even further, however, to 1701, when Leibniz published an anonymous review of Petersen's first work advocating universal salvation. This review appeared in Johann Georg Eckart's monthly digest *Monatlicher Auzug aus allerhand neuherausgegeben nützlichen und artigen Büchern.*

Leibniz's relationship with Petersen can only be understood in terms of his previous relationship with van Helmont. It is no coincidence that in his review of Petersen's book Leibniz specifically mentions both van Helmont and his disciple, Anne Conway, and it is surely significant that he should also mention the book he ghosted for van Helmont, *Thoughts on Genesis,* which advocated universal salvation:

> The author adds that several people still supported this doctrine, especially during the time of the Reform. . . . In her *Philosophical work, which contains the principles of the most ancient and modern philosophy,* the English Countess writes, "Christ has sanctified in the nature of man the nature of all creatures, so as to restore the creatures from corruption." (This Lady was Countess Conway, the sister of Chancellor Heneage Finch, as one remembers often to have heard from Monsieur Helmont). . . .
>
> Monsieur Francis Mercury van Helmont wished to maintain in diverse ways the restitution of all things and progress toward what is better in his *Cogitata in Genesim* (Thoughts on Genesis), as elsewhere. But he believed that souls ordinarily experience metempsychosis, that there always exist a certain number of human souls (and of every other sort) and that they will be led by revolutions from one body to another, always better, and glorified all together at the same

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[63] Fichant is the first to have published this manuscript (LBr 720, fol. 2v): "Ego qui saepe cogitare soleo, quomodo fieri queat ut dotes magnorum hominum maxime in communia commoda proficiant,vidi a Te posse profiscisci, quod saepe optavi, justum opus rerum coelestium heroico carmine comprehensum. Theologia enim sublimior etiam in prosa splendet, qui si induat virgilianam majestatem, quam tu unus et omnium optime circumdare posses. Materia tanti operis: primum Deus in abdito aeternitatis sibi perpetuo sufficiens, tum Cosmogonia, mox Oeconomia providentiae in gubernatione rerum; sed altera pars operis de futuris, sive ad corpora sive ad animas pertineant et ad hunc vel alium, ubi de purification animarum et restitutione rerum, vel potius amplification et exaltatione per gradus. Novissimam nec infimam partem dari optem magnitudini coelestis regni et ut sic dicam Aulae divina, ibi admiranda Angelicarum virtutum pingenda essent vivis coloribus et beatarum animarum celebranda felicitas, quibus non noster tantum sub pedibus orbis sed innumerabiles mundi paterent, et variis in omne aevum spectaculis divinae sapientiae et bonitatis, incederent magis magisque amorem et venerationem supremae Mentis. Hic castus elegantissimarum fictionum locus esset; etsi nihil a nobis tam pulchrum fingi possit, quod non veritate superetur. Praeter Te autem, a quo tale quid sperari posset, neminem novi, cui et divinarum rerum recessus interiores patent, et vim eloquendi entheam" (Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaines,* pp. 25ff.).

> time in their leader, Christ. He also maintained that Christ himself was a reincarnation of Adam and that all other human souls preexisted and must once again attain perfection with and in Christ (along with other rather extraordinary ideas that came to him during his life).[64]

Here as elsewhere, in fact in all his public references to van Helmont, Leibniz keeps his distance and hardly sounds enthusiastic. Indeed, who could possibly tell from this paragraph—supposing one knew the review was written by Leibniz, as some people eventually did—that Leibniz had any part whatsoever in the writing and publication of *Thoughts on Genesis*? Nevertheless, van Helmont is the missing link between Leibniz and Petersen. Petersen knew van Helmont, and van Helmont's writings (as well as Anne Conway's) were sources he used, as his references to both reveal.[65] In fact, Petersen's arguments in favor of universal salvation closely follow those given by van Helmont and Conway, namely that eternal punishment for finite sins is out of all proportion and inconsistent with God's mercy and justice; that God could not possibly damn people who, through no fault of their own, had never hard of Christianity; and finally that pain and suffering are beneficial, and God only punishes his creatures for their own good and eventual salvation. The documents that Fichant has assembled can therefore best be understood if placed within the larger context of Leibniz's knowledge of and interest in the Lurianic Kabbalah. What made Leibniz so receptive to Petersen was his exposure to the kabbalistic idea of *tikkun*, an idea that is a basic aspect of all van Helmont's writing and thinking and one he discussed at length with Leibniz. However stand-offish Leibniz was publicly about van Helmont and his ideas, the very fact that he refers to both so often indicates the measure of his interest.

This can be proven if one takes into account three short documents written by Leibniz between 1694 and 1696, precisely the years of Leibniz's most extensive contact with van Helmont. Fichant was apparently unwaware

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[64] Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaine*, pp. 95, 97: "L'auteur ajoute que quelques-uns ont encore soutenu cette doctrine, surtout au temps de la Réforme. La *Comtesse anglaise*, dans les *Opuscula philos. quibus continentur principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae*, 1690 (Opuscules philosophiques, où sont compris les principes de la philosophie la plus ancienne comme de la plus récente), ecrit: "Le Christ a sanctifié dans la nature de l'homme la nature de toutes les créatures. . . afin de restaurer les créatures de la corruption." (Cette ame était une Comtesse de Connaway, et soeur du Chancelier Henneage Finch, comme on se souvient l'avoir entendu du sieur Helmont. . . .

M. François Mercure van *Helmont* a voulu soutenir de diverses façons dans ses *Cogitata in Genesim* (Pensées sur la Genèse), et ailleurs aussi, la Restitution et le progès vers le mieux; mais il considère que l'état ordinaire des âmes est une métempsycose; il demeure toujours un nombre déterminé d'âmes humaines (et de chaque espèce); elles seraient amenées par les révolutions des corps à des corps toujours supérieurs et toutes ensemble glorifiées en mêmes temps dans leur chef, le Christ; il soutient bien plus que le Christ est lui-même une métempsycose d'Adam, en qui toutes les autre âmes humaines ont préexisté et doivent de nouveaux parvenir à la perfection avec lui et en lui. Suivent d'autres idées aussi extraordinarires qui lui sont venues sa vie durant."

[65] See for example, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, *Das Geheimniss der Erst-Gebohren aller Creaturen von Christo Jesu dem Gott-Menschen*, pp. 23-29, 41-44, 187, 190-195; *idem*, Μυστηριον αποκαταστασεως παντων, *das ist, Das Geheimnis der Widerbringung aller Dinge*, I:85-86, where he quotes pages of Conway's book.

of these documents, but they show that Leibniz was thinking about progress and perfection, although he had not yet come to the conclusion he would eventually reach. Gaston Grua speculates that these documents were inspired either by Leibniz's conversations with van Helmont or by reading his works.[66] The first two documents offer a somewhat tortured and tentative discussion about whether or not things progress and become perfect. The third and last document entitled *Of Man, Happiness, God, and Christ* is a crucial text in terms of Leibniz's theodicy. It is a resumé of kabbalistic, alchemical, and gnostic ideas typical of van Helmont; but even more importantly, it elaborates the kabbalistic doctrine of *tikkun,* or the final redemption of all things, and advances the view that it is the inner Christ, not the external Christ on the cross, who has the power to save. The Pelagian implications of this idea are obvious. This document includes the following ideas which would have been relevant to anyone thinking in terms of a theodicy: the created world was produced by divine emanation; God contains "all in one" and everything tends towards this one; good comes from within (an idea reminiscent of Leibniz's view that monads are entirely self-activated); matter is a source of contagion, from which souls must remove themselves; everything seeks the highest good but differently; evil is nothing but privation; suffering and punishment are temporary and salutary; selfishness and self-love were Lucifer's major sin (thus, by implication charity towards one's fellow man is imperative); and lastly, Leibniz repeats the idea that everything ultimately returns to God. Axiom 23 contains an especially interesting insertion that sounds very much like the voice of Leibniz cropping up in the middle of a kabbalistic document. According to this axiom, bodies come from "stars (or rather forms, *archei*, ideas, or astral forces)," but, as the insertion says, "I might rather say, more philosophically, the active forces of the first universe." This document provides clear evidence that Leibniz was re-emersing himself in kabbalistic philosophy during these years, especially in those aspects dealing with creation, the fall, and redemption.

> Concerning Man, Blessedness, God, and Christ
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> 1) In man there is spirit, soul and body: or mind, reason, flesh or sense. Mind considers higher matters, reason things in the middle, and sense inferior matters. Three worlds, the divine, the Angelic <spiritual>,[67] the sensible.[68] The superior world contains the inferior. The inferior is the shadow of the superior. [An angel has every inferior world in himself in a spiritual manner so that he can display it if he wishes.][69] God contains all in one and everything tends toward this one; this is the highest good of all things. Good is internal and external. The first is true, the second falsely called good. Internal good flows from us; external good, as is generally accepted, can be called fortune, and it is not in our power.

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[66] Grua, I: 94, n. 47.

[67] insertion.

[68] The worlds of *creationis, formationis, factionis*, are described in both the Zohar and the *Seder Olam.*

[69] Grua indicates deletions with square brackets.

2) Particular external goods (of body and mind) come from fortune or they are acquired either from nature, study, or chance. Nevertheless, everything is called fortuitous in a certain sense and comes from the heavens (that is from the whole flow of bodies) and, as they are given by chance, they can be taken away by it.

3) Terrestrial man comes from this world, or slime, whence he depends on the heavens or fortune. While men are eager for good fortune, they make themselves slaves of the stars <like brutes>. Fortune harasses its slaves <as it changes> just as soldiers are worn out by marching. But the immortal part of man must dominate astral fate or bodily impressions. Wisdom is greater than fate (those who think about the immortal part of themselves recognize the angels as brothers, God as a father, and the body as a servant). For the better part of us is created in the image of God like the angels. Those who engage in contemplating these things and dwell on eternal matters, removing the soul from sensible things, will be removed from corporeal contagion and dominate the stars. They will see the clouds and the stars of heaven beneath their feet.

4) Sadness and joy improperly linked to fortune.

5) She only lends her gifts; a mistake to abide there.

6) Everything seeks the highest good, but differently.

7) Riches, transitory or deceitful, and not honorable.

8) Honor fortuitous and alluring.

9) Posthumous glory limited.

10) Pleasures, beauty transitory. No happiness on earth.

11) Earthly goods compete among themselves. God alone unites all goods.

12) Even brought together they are nothing but the shadow of true goods.

13) True goodness, wisdom, justice, and happiness are essentially in God.

14) God united. Adhering to God, we become a first-born witness (Jo. 17).

15) Men become happy "by obtaining divinity," sons of God by Christ.

16) The end of things, that is the good. Separating ourselves, we renounce our being.

17) Everything obeys God. Evil is nothing; it comes from privation in the creatures.

18) Evil consists in the degree to which all things do not attain the highest good. However evil is useful to the good.

19) To do evil is impotence. Evil men serve good men, as beasts men.

20) Amelioration by punishment.

21) Impunity is not chance but sickness. Pity for the wicked.

22) All providential events are good for the good.

23) An ascent from the sensible to the intellectual, from creatures to God.

God produces angels by saying, "let there be light." From this light stars (or rather forms, archei, ideas, or astral forces <or I might rather say, more philosophically, the active forces of the first universe>, bodies come from these.

24) God, a maximum of infinity, a minimum of indivisibility . . . Christ the center of eternal life.

25) Lucifer sought his happiness in himself. It is a law of nature that condemns that "self love" as idolatry. "To be turned towards himself is to aim at nothing. Concerning these things see Theologia Germanica, Kempis, and Tauler. Finally God shines for everything, like the sun, but those [trying to] ascend by themselves do not see him."

26) Evil is possible on account of blindness. "But it is not God's part to violate the order of the highest things."

27) "True theology in the knowledge of Adam and Christ, of ourselves and of God. Of Adam, to turn to oneself < to eat the body and blood of Adam>.

> Of Christ, to abandon oneself to God < to eat the body and blood of the son of God>."
>
> The external Adam does no harm, only the internal. The external Christ does not come forward but the internal. Therefore he who puts on Christ in faith has within himself life, light, God, the highest good. (Everything returns to one, or to God. This is to understand the harmony of things. . . . The divine light shines in the shadows of the creatures.[70]

Could these be notes jotted down by Leibniz after one of his many conversations with van Helmont? The two men spent a great deal of time together when van Helmont when he visited Hanover in 1696, and Leibniz kept notes of their discussions at other times as well.[71]

But did Leibniz eventually embrace the idea of universal salvation? At the end of his study Fichant raises this question but says the answer goes beyond the scope of his work. However, he gives many indications that the answer is positive.[72] Fichant sees 1701 as a key date in Leibniz's changing attitude towards progress and universal salvation. But as the last three documents suggest, the change occurred earlier, between 1694 and 1696. By the time Leibniz ghosted van Helmont's *Thoughts on Genesis* in 1697 he had come to believe progress was inevitable. This conviction, in turn, provided the basis for his final theodicy.

Van Helmont had the reputation of being one of the few people living who could teach the essence of the ancient kabbalistic philosophy of Pythagoras. This is how he was described in a letter to Leibniz by Hermann von der Hardt (1660-1746), a noted linguist and scholar, who was an ardent admirer of van Helmont:

> I marvel at the genius of Helmont. I have learned many things from this man that could not be known except from him. In this old man I have observed not the traces but the every essence of the ancient first philosophy of Pythagoras, Plato, and the Cabbala. I have used the self-same ancient moral and symbolic philosophy, so clear is it for our deformed age. Two principles supply the foundation for the building: the pre-existence of souls and their revolution and transmigration. From these all other things flow. Nor is he churlish, as is everyone at present everywhere.[73]

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[70] Grua's transcription is a resume of the full text (Niedersäschsische Landesbibliothek, MS LBr 67, fols. 52-3: De Homine. Beatitudine. Deo. Christo [1694-1696].

[71] See, for example, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MSS LH VI, 3, 8, 3-4, 9-10.; LH I, 5, 2, 15-18.

[72] Fichant, *De L'horizon de la doctrine humaines*, p. 200: "'Leibniz a-t-il pour autant fait sienne la doctrine de la "salvation universelle?" La question déborde assurément l'interprétation de l'opuscule que nous éditions; pourtant sa teneur autant que son titre amènent à la poser, au moins aux marges de notre interprétation."'

[73] LBr 389, fol. 29 (Helmstedt, 11 July 1696): "Helmontii ingenium miratus sum. Multaque ex viro scrutatus sum quae non nisi ex viro cognosci possent. Antiquae Philosophiae Pythagorico-Platonicae, Cabbalisticaeve priscae, non vestigia, sed ideam in hoc sene perspexi. Uti ergo antiqua isthaec philosophia moralis et symbolica, ita et arguta est, nostris seculis difformis. Duo principia fundamentum aedificio suggerunt: Praexistentia animarum, ac revolutio, aut migratio earundem! Ex his cetera fluunt omnia. Non illepidus quoque, uti praesentis ubique animi est." Von der Hart was the Duke of Brunswick's secretary, the professor of oriental languages and librarian at Helmstedt, and a distinguished scholar, known

Pythagoras offered his followers the hope of becoming divine through a gnostic transformative experience attained by contemplating the divine order reveled in nature.[74] Like Hermeticists and Kabbalists, Pythagoras believed in the transmigration of souls. In the *Metamorphosis* Ovid puts the following words in Pythagoras' mouth:

> Nothing retains its own form; but Nature, the great renewer, ever makes up forms from other forms. Be sure there's nothing perishes in the whole universe; it does but vary and renew its form.[75]

Similar, even identical, words might easily have sprung from Leibniz's lips. If Michael Gottlieb Hansch is to be believed Leibniz launched into a Pythagorean dialogue over a cup of caffe latte! As Hansch reports,

> I remember that once, when Leibniz and I met in Leipzig and were drinking caffe latte, a beverage which he greatly savored, he said that in the cup from which he was drinking there might be, for all we know, monads that in future time would become human souls.[76]

Voltaire, in his usual way ups the ante and says that Leibniz claimed even a drop of urine or a bit of excrement contains an infinity of monads.[77]

There are other aspects of Leibniz's thought that appear to bear the imprint of van Helmont's ideas. In his *Theodicy,* he denies that God could predestine anyone to damnation, an interesting position for someone who remained a Lutheran his entire life, although he ceased to take communion.[78] He takes the same position as van Helmont that divine punishment is an act of redemption not retribution. He employs the alchemical and Christian image of the seed that disintegrates before it can germinate:

> Evil often serves to makes us savour good the more; sometimes too it contributes to a greater perfection in him who suffers it, as the seed that one sows is subject to a kind of corruption before it can germinate: This is a beautiful similitude which Jesus himself used.[79]

What is even more interesting, however, is that Leibniz takes the extremely radical step in the *Theodicy* of suggesting that one does not have to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved.[80] This was one of the opinions that had landed van Helmont in the dungeons of the Roman Inquisition in 1662. That Leibniz could say such a thing fifty years later shows how much the religious climate had changed in the intervening years:

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for his *Historia Consillii Constanini* (1700). Von der Hardt also published a book on the practical Kabbalah (*Aenigmata Judaeorum Religiosissima.* Helmstedt, 1705).

[74] Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics.*

[75] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. J. Miller. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), bk. xv, 552ff.

[76] Hansch, *Godofredi Guilielmi Leibnitii Principia Philosophiae More Geometrico Demonstrata*, p. 135.

[77] *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton, The Complete Works of Voltaire*, 15: 242, 244.

[78] Goldenbaum, "Leibniz as a Lutheran."

[79] *Theodicy,* par. 23, p. 137.

[80] To understand just how radical this position was at the time, see Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*

> I would be rather on the side of those who grant to all men a grace sufficient to draw them away from evil, provided they have a sufficient tendency to profit by this succour, and not to reject it voluntarily. The objection is made that there has been and still is a countless multitude of men, among civilized peoples and among barbarians, who have never had this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ which is necessary for those who would tread the wonted paths to salvation. . . .
>
> Supposing that today a knowledge of Jesus Christ according to the flesh is absolutely necessary to salvation, as indeed it is safest to teach, it will be possible to say that God will give that knowledge to all those who do, humanly speaking, that which in them lies, even though God must needs give it by a miracle. Moreover, we cannot know what passes in souls at the point of death; and if sundry learned and serious theologians claim that children received in baptism a kind of faith, although they do not remember it afterwards when they are questioned about it, why should one maintain that nothing of a like nature, or even more definite, could come about in the dying, whom we cannot interrogate after their death? Thus there are countless paths open to God, giving him means of satisfying his justice and his goodness: and the only thing that may allege against this is that we know not what way he employs; which is far from being a valid objection.[81]

I realize that Leibniz also presents more orthodox views affirming retributive justice and eternal damnation in the *Theodicy*. This work was, after all, aimed at the general public and consequently not a place where Leibniz would exhibit his more controversial views. This only makes it all the more extraordinary that within this work one can find such unorthodox statements. Passages such as these show that Leibniz did eventually arrive at a viable theodicy. I would argue that he did so because he accepted many of van Helmont's kabbalistic ideas. This is not to say that van Helmont's and von Rosenroth's kabbalistic theories were the only or most important elements that went into the making of Leibniz's mature and considered monadology, simply that any comprehensive discussion of the sources of Leibniz's thought is incomplete unless it recognizes the Lurianic Kabbalah as one component in the fashioning of his fully developed philosophy.

By the time Leibniz's mature philosophy was in place, he was not a determinist, he was not a dualist, he was not an idealist, and he was not a phenomenalist. He was a man whose philosophy defied classification and who was in many respects so far ahead of his time that it has only recently been fully appreciated. The monads that provide the stuff of the Leibnizian universe are basically fields of force that anticipate modern field theory. Voltaire's witty diatribe against Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" falls short because Leibniz really believes this world is the best because it has the capacity to become better and better. The Lurianic kabbalistic doctrine of *tikkun* provided a foundation for Leibniz's theodicy, and his concept of monads shared the kabbalistic belief that matter and spirit are simply opposite ends of a continuum. Leibniz appropriated the term monad from van Helmont, not from Giordano Bruno, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, or

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[81] *Theodicy*, par. 95 & 98, pp. 175, 177.

Anne Conway, as has been suggested,[82] and he used the same metaphorical language of drowsiness and sleep to describe why some monads are less perfect than others. These are not novel claims. Only after I had finished the book upon which this chapter is based did I learn that one of Leibniz's contemporaries, in all probability John Toland, claimed Leibniz had been influenced by the Kabbalah.[83] In an anonymous review of Leibniz's system of pre-established harmony published in the *Histoire Critique de la Republique des Lettres,* the author comes right out and says that although he finds Leibniz's philosophy incomprehensible, there is nothing surprising about his system. It all comes straight out of the *Kabbala denudata*![84]

Kant thought Leibniz's idea of "slumbering" monads was unbelievably funny.[85] Perhaps it is. But behind it lay the conviction that all things could better themselves—they had simply to "wake up"; and this, in turn, encouraged the humanitarian outlook and activist philosophy that separates van Helmont and Leibniz from so many of their contemporaries, who despised the common man and feared that change would undermine the *status quo.*

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[82] Thouverez believes Leibniz borrowed the term from Bruno, as does Bréhier (M. Bréhier, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, II:247). Stein disagrees (*Leibniz und Spinoza*, pp. 198, 201, 204, 206). Feilchenfeld argues for Henry More ("Leibniz und Henry More"). Wilson suggests Cudworth (*Leibniz's metaphysics*, pp. 177, 188-9. Merchant proposes Anne Conway ("The Vitalism of Anne Conway: Its Impact on Leibniz's Concept of Monad").

[83] I am grateful to Stuart Brown for this reference.

[84] *Historire Critique de la Republique des Lettres*, 1716, Article V, pp. 116-19 (the editor's introduction to this review says it was written for the Electress Sophie Charlotte of Prussia. Hence she is the "Madame" addressed): "Les ordres de Vôtre Majesté sont toujours si raisonnables, que j'ai trouvé jusqu'ici une très-grande facilité à les executer. Mais je ne veux point dissimuler, qu'il m'est impossible à present de satisfaire sa curiosité; *l'Ecrit*, que vous m'avez fait la grace de me mettre entre les mains, pour en savoir mon sentiment, m'est aussi peu intelligible que le langage des Hurons. Cet aveu ne se doit nullement entendre, comme une censure de l'illustre Auteur; mais se doit uniquement rapporter à ma propre ignorance, que je suis plus prêt a avouër, que ne sont les autres à m'en faire des reproches. . . .

Il est sûr au moins, que le Systême de M. Leibnitz ne me surprend pas par sa nouveauté; puisqu'il a, en partie, un rapport visible avec la *Cabale* des Rabbins, comme on le peut voir dans un livre Latin, dont le titre est *Cabala denudata*, ou la *Cabale dévoilée*. Ces habiles Maîtres ne reconnoissent qu'*une seule substance de toutes choses*. Cette substance est *l'Esprit*; lequel, selon eux, est acuellement divisé en autant *d'Individus*, qu'il se trouve de *points Mathematiques* dans l'Univers. Les *Accidens*, dont chacun de ceux-ci est revêtu, sont ce qu'ils appellent *la Matiere*; laquelle n'est pas, comme vous croyez, sans doute, Madame, une *Substance*, mais plûtôt une *Ombre*, & souvent ils l'appellent un. . . *Rien*. Tout ce qu'ils disent de la pensée de ces Esprits nombreux, de leurs diverses manieres d'union, division, assemblage, pression, ou separation, pour constituer ces quantités particulieres, que nous appellons des *Corps*, (mais qui ne sont, dans leur Philosophie, que des *Esprits* deguisés par des *Ombres*, ou couverts de *Riens*) s'accorde parfaitement bien avec les sentiments de M. Leibnitz, autant que je les entrevois. Figurez-vous donc, Madame, qu'aujourd'hui une Republique d'Esprits se fait l'honneur d'écrire à Vôtre Majesté; puisque, sans être des plus gros ou des plus gras, je renferme moi seul un assez bon nombre de Points Mathematiques, pour en former une passsable Republique. Mais je crains que quelqu'un, qui se plait aux équivoques, ne vous dise, que ce n'est que de la pure matiere qui brouille ici de papier, sans que l'esprit s'en mêle le moins du monde. . ."

[85] See *What Real Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters I have argued that the Kabbalah deserves a place in western history because of the impact it has had on science and religion by fostering the ideals of progress and toleration. I have further argued that studying the Kabbalah in its western setting contributes to an understanding of the multiple ways in which Jews and Christians interacted. The idea that an occult source such as the Kabbalah contributed to science obviously owes a profound debt to Frances Yates. My second contention, that the Kabbalah illustrates the interaction of Jews and Christians, owes a great deal to the research of Gershom Scholem; however, it rejects his underlying assumption that developments in Jewish history were internally motivated.

My argument that the court at Sulzbach can legitimately be described as "Rosicrucian" rests on Yates' contention that the *Rosicrucian Manifestos* were expressions of the new and exhilarating view of human potential and prowess that made the scientific revolution possible. With their call for the "Universal and General Reformation of the whole world" and their conviction that creation can be brought back to the state in which Adam found it, the *Manifestos* provided a bridge between Renaissance Hermeticism and modern science. On the basis of this evaluation of their importance, Yates suggested the word "Rosicrucian" should enter the vocabulary of serious historians to describe the kind of activist, reforming mentality that paved the way for modern science.[1]

As I mentioned earlier, Yates thesis has received serious criticism on the grounds that her evidence was scanty, hypothetical, and her generalizations unwarranted.[2] The idea that good science could come out of bad occultism clearly affronted some scholars.[3] The problem with this position, however, is that it fails to explain why so many thinkers in the early modern period clearly did belong in both the occult and the scientific camp, a point made repeatedly by many historians in recent years. Mounting evidence has conclusively shown that the ideas of the major thinkers in the scientific pantheon were influenced by occult and especially alchemical theories. Consequently, it has

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[1] Yates, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," p. 263.

[2] Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History." Westman, ""Magical Reform and Astronomical Reform: The Yates Thesis Reconsidered." For more measured criticism see Webster, *The Great Instauration*, p. 576; McGuire, "Neoplatonism and Active Principles: Newton and the *Corpus Hermeticum*"; Rossi, "Hermeticism, Rationality and the Scientific Revolution." For a positive assessment of the Yates thesis, see Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, pp. 254-63; Rattansi, "Reason in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosophy," pp. 160-5.

[3] Hesse, "Hermeticism and Historiography: An Apology for the Internal History of Science;" Brian Vickers, "Analogy and Identity"; idem, "On the Function of Analogy in the Occult." For a critique of Vickers' attempt to separate magic and science, see Curry, "Revision of Science and Magic."

become less and less tenable to separate good science from bad occultism. This was the basic conclusion reached by the panelists who assembled at the Folger Library in 1982 to examine the Yates thesis. The majority of contributors concluded that while Yates' claim for Hermeticism as the decisive force was exaggerated, her basic insight into the manifold connections between occultism and science in the early modern period is beyond dispute. The most trenchant deconstruction of Hermeticism in this volume appears in Brian Copenhaver's essay, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance." While not disputing the impact that magic had in fostering the notions of manipulation and control so central to the development of modern science, Copenhaver persuasively argues that the real source of magic theory was not Hermeticism but Neoplatonism. He therefore cautions those scholars who dismiss magic as unimportant in the formation of modern science because they reject the influence of Hermeticism and suggests they take into account all sources of Renaissance magic—Neoplatonism, Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Aquinas, and Albertus Magnus.[4]

While the participants in the Folger seminar accepted the Yates thesis along general lines, other scholars have argued that the optimistic view of human nature attributed by Yates to Hermeticism was derived from earlier and different sources. Charles Trinkhaus, for example, thinks that patristic theology was a far more important and earlier source for this new optimism.[5] Following Garin, he believes the hermetic vision of deified man derived from the medieval Latin translation of the *Asclepius* was firmly in place in patristic and pre-scholastic medieval thought, and he seconds Garin's contention that the foundation for an optimistic assessment of human nature lay in two key Christian concepts: the Genesis image of man as created in the image of God and the doctrine of the Incarnation.[6] Trinkaus sees Augustine as a particularly important source in fostering the optimistic view of human potential characteristic of humanists and Renaissance Neoplatonists.[7]

To my mind there are several problems with Trinkhaus' analysis. In order for Augustine to have been an important source for the optimistic assessment of human nature characteristic of the early humanists, they would have had to have read his works very selectively, virtually ignoring the extreme pessimism of his later writings.[8] Enormous feats of mental acrobatics would be required to overlook the profound pessimism characteristic of Augustinian anthropology. William Bouswma highlights this pessimism in the

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[4] Copenhaver's paper confirmed the conclusions reached by McGuire in "Neoplatonism and Active Principles." Festugière also describes the eclectic nature of early Hermeticism in *La Révèlation d'Hermes Trismégistes*. Schmitt described Hermeticism as a not very distinctive subspecies of Neoplatonism in "Reappraisals in Renaissance Science."

[5] Trinkhaus, *In our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2: 476-508, 519-24.

[6] ibid., 1: 187-8.

[7] ibid., 2: 463-4, 501.

[8] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 395. On Augustine's pessimism, see also Kleinberg, "De Agone christiano: The Preacher and his Audience;" Pagels, "*Adam, Eve, and the Serpent.*

contrast he draws between the Augustinian and Stoic view of man. While Stoics believed men contain a divine spark or seed, identified with reason, which allows them to comprehend and adapt themselves to the divine order, Augustine and later Augstinians stressed human depravity and insisted on the complete inability of man to rely on his own powers for salvation.[9] Bouwsma does, however, agree with Trinkhaus in finding a positive element in Augustine's rejection of determinism. Man may be depraved but he is not bound to cosmic laws as in Stoicism; a measure of freedom is therefore provided for human action and creativity.[10]

Even if one agrees that Augustine allowed a measure of freedom to man, this freedom seems to me utterly different from that envisioned by the Florentine Platonists. For in Augustine, as in all orthodox patristic and Christian writings, there is the inescapable fact that man must rely on grace for salvation. This idea is virtually eliminated in the Florentine Platonists and the numerous sixteenth and seventeenth century proponents of occultism. The opening paragraph of Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* describing man's ability to become whatever he wishes, even to the point of divinity, is too well known to need quoting. Pico places absolutely no limitations on man. He has only to "aspire" and to "will," both key words in the *Oration*, and he will find himself "inferior to. . . [the angels] in nothing. "[F]or if we will. . . ," says Pico, "we can."

Pico's emphasis on man's ability to control his own destiny without any external help appears in Ficino as well. Ficino describes man's striving to "become God" as entirely "natural," in the same way that flight is to birds; man requires no external, divine assistance to become perfect in this world.[11] Like Pico, Ficino quotes the *Asclepius* passage describing man's ability to become anything he wishes, and he quotes Hermes Trismegistus to the effect that man is "a great miracle."[12] One might argue that even this exalted vision of man's potential remains essentially Christian inasmuch as Ficino is careful to say that it is God who invests the power of perfectibility in human beings. But the very fact that this power is innate obviates the need for either Christ or the Catholic Church, and in taking such a radical position Ficino is anything but orthodox. The sense of sin that is so remarkable in Augustine seems to be entirely absent in Ficino, and in this he follows the Neoplatonists far more than any Christian. As R. T. Wallis has said of Plotinus, "[he] lacks any sense of sin or of the need for redemption. . . . Our true self is eternally saved and all that is required is to wake up to this fact, a process requiring self-discipline, but perfectly within the soul's own power."[13] The idea that the individual has the ability to take complete charge of his own salvation as

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[9] Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought, pp. 25-6.

[10] Ibid., p. 27.

[11] *Theologia Platonica*, 2: 247. Cited in Trinkhaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2: 487; see also 2: 491.

[12] *Theologia Platonica*, 2: 256-8. Cited in ibid., 2: 489-90.

[13] Wallis, *Neoplatonism* , p. 90.

well as the world's, which appears to me to be a prominent feature of both Pico's and Ficino's philosophy, is, I would argue, problematic in terms of the Christian concepts of original sin and the atonement. Hans Blumenberg makes the further argument that the future envisioned by the modern idea of progress is a product of immanent development, not of some transcendental, external divine intervention (*deus ex machina*). Such an idea of progress could not, therefore, have developed from orthodox Christianity but only in opposition to it. [14]

What led Frances Yates to stress the importance of Hermeticism in the development of modern science was her work on Giordano Bruno. But while she stressed the mystical and magical side of Bruno's thought, scholars are now emphasizing the progressive scientific aspects. Hilary Gatti describes this new approach:

> Some of the most recent work on Bruno shows a marked reaction against such a primary emphasis on his mysticism and magic. His Copernicanism has been re-examined and revalued. His interest in, and knowledge of the scientific inquiries of his times, such as the study of comets, has been underlined. In general, it is precisely where Bruno breaks away from the Neoplatonic magi to establish a new cosmic vision that he is attracting the attention of many scholars today.[15]

Gatti does not deny the hermetic roots of Bruno's extraordinary vision of human potential, but she, along with other scholars, considers them (and Neoplatonic sources in general) less important in shaping Bruno's thought than pre-Socratic, Pythagorean, Stoic, and Epicurean sources.[16] In her opinion the following quotation, which on the face of it seems so clearly "Hermetic," more directly echoes Lucretian cosmology:

> Now behold the man who has fended the air, pierced the sky, journeyed amongst the stars, traveled beyond the margins of the world, dissolved the imaginary barriers of the first, eight, ninth, tenth, and other spheres, if it had been possible to add others through the reports of vain mathematicians, and the blind visions of false philosophers. Thus using every sense and reason, with the key of passionate enquiry, he has opened those cloisters of truth which it is in our power to open, laid bare veiled and hidden nature: he has given eyes to the moles, illuminated the blind who are unable to fix their eyes and focus her image in the many mirrors which on all sides reflect it to him.[17]

What Gatti and recent scholars have shown is that this vision was thoroughly compatible with science, something even Frances Yates was unwilling to claim. As Yates said at the end of her book on Bruno, "The procedures with which the Magus attempted to operate have nothing to do with genuine science. The question is, did they stimulate the will towards genuine science

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[14] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age.*

[15] Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge: Giordano Bruno in England* pp. 49-50.

[16] Gatti, private communication. Cf. Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno*; Aquilecchia, *Giordano Bruno*. Cf. Ossler, ed., *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought.*

[17] Cited in Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge*, p. 32.

and its operation?"[18] Gatti concludes that it was not Bruno's Hermeticism so much as his indebtedness to rediscovered Greek and Roman scientific texts that led him to demand complete freedom of thought as a necessary condition for scientific investigation. He was executed for this demand, not for some hypothetical attempt to institute a magical-Hermetic philosophy. Bruno's unorthodox religious views—he had sympathies with Arian doctrine, denied the immaculate conception and Virgin birth, rejected the worship of saints, and advised his fellow monks to study the early Church Fathers—went hand and hand with his unorthodox cosmology.

A collateral aspect of the Yates thesis that has been questioned is her assertion that Hermeticism was responsible for orienting men towards an active rather than a contemplative life and for stressing the power of the will in shaping human affairs. According to Trinkhaus the idea that contemplation represented the highest achievement of human beings was only true of one medieval tradition, the Thomist, and not even for all of that. The early humanists had at their disposal plenty of patristic and medieval sources emphasizing the importance of the will and the value of human activity.[19] While there is some truth in this, the positive evaluation of the active life one finds in Ficino and Pico and their numerous followers seems to me to be qualitatively different from anything in patristic, medieval, or early humanist writings. Ficino offers a vision of man as a gnostic savior, something that is inconceivable in Augustinian theology:

> The human mind vindicates to itself a right to divinity not only in forming and shaping matter through the method of arts, as we have said, but also in transmuting the species of things by command, which work is indeed called a miracle, not because it is beyond the nature of our soul, when it is made an instrument of God, but because, since it is something great and rarely done, it generates admiration. Here we marvel that the souls of men dedicated to God rule the elements, call upon the winds, force the clouds to rain, chase away fogs, cure the diseases of human bodies and the rest. These plainly were done in certain ages among various peoples, as poets sing, historians narrate, and those who are the most excellent of philosophers, especially the Platonists, do not deny, the ancient theologians testify, above all Hermes and Orpheus, and the later theologians also prove by word and deed.[20]

One of the reasons man is so potentially powerful is that he is a master of the mechanical arts. Ficino's high estimation of the mechanical arts comes out clearly in several passages. He praises man's accomplishments in the these arts as one of his defining characteristics, and he mentions Daedalus and Icarus in a positive way, which as far as I know was not done in the Middle Ages.[21]

Although Lynn White, Jean Gimpel, Lewis Mumford, William Eamon, Elspeth Whitnery, and others argue that the Middle Ages provided the

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[18] Yates, *GBHT*, p. 449.
[19] Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2: 499-500.
[20] *Theologia Platonica*, 2: 229. Cited in ibid., p. 486.
[21] *Theologia Platonica*, 2: 223-5. Cited in ibid., pp. 482, 483-4.

foundation for the modern work ethic and faith in technological progress,[22] the contemplative life was still valued more highly than the active life, and the mechanical arts were tainted by their association with manual labor and concern with worldly ends. The Aristotelian core of Scholasticism accentuated the division between the liberal and the mechanical arts by valuing mental work more than manual.[23] During the Middle Ages a distinction was drawn between wondrous nature and her pale imitator, art, a distinction which further contributed to a negative attitude towards manual labor. The pejorative view of the mechanical arts was enshrined in the etymology deriving the term from the Greek word for adultery (*moicheia*) on the grounds that the mechanical arts trick and deceive. This etymology was widespread in the Latin West.[24] Given such evidence, one is forced to conclude, I believe, that Ficino's exalted view of man's ability to use his inborn talents, his knowledge, and his mechanical skills to shape and change his environment marked a radical revision of prevailing medieval attitudes.

Such a conclusion is supported by the condemnation of worldly wisdom and especially of curiosity that runs like a leitmotif through the medieval period.[25] Ginzburg emphasizes the effect Jerome's mistranslation of Romans 11: 20 had in turning curiosity into a sin. Jerome translated Paul's injunction "be not high-minded" as "noli altum sapere," which was consistently interpreted to mean "do not seek to know high things."[26] No one was more critical of human curiosity than Augustine, who defined it as one of the three forms of the vice "concupiscence": lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and worldly ambition. Curiosity was "lust of the eyes,"[27] and Augustine links it directly with both the sin of pride and the fall. Furthermore, curiosity was the source of heresy and the black arts. The association of curiosity with sin, pride, heresy, and magic became commonplace in medieval thought. The idea that curiosity could all too easily lead to magic was enshrined in the Faust Legend. Steiner denies that the Faust legend was a product of the Reformation and particularly of Lutheran thought. He provides ample evidence to show that it fits in splendidly with the medieval Church's condemnation of curiosity.

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[22] White, "Cultural Climates and Technological Advance in the Middle Ages"; Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages*; Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*; Eamon, "Technology as Magic in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance"; idem, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*; Whitnery, *Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the Thirteenth Century*.

[23] Ovitt, *The Restoration of Perfection: Labor and Technology in Medieval Culture*.

[24] Newman, "Technology and Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages."

[25] Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom*, ch. 1.

[26] Ginzburg, "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries."

[27] *Confessions*, Bk. 5.3.3. For a discussion of patristic and medieval attitudes towards curiosity, see Steiner, "The Faust Legend and the Christian Tradition"; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, pp. 59ff; Peters, "'Libertas Inquirendi' and the Vitium Curiositatis in Medieval Thought."

Faust was only one of many figures damned for their curiosity in the medieval period.[28] Icarus, Daedalus, Prometheus, and Proteus were also condemned either for aiming to high, or, as in the case of Proteus, for adapting too easily to changing circumstances. The Hermetic image of man as marvelously protean, the image that exhilarated Pico and Ficino,[29] had little appeal for those who feared and distrusted change, viewing the world ideally as a static hierarchy where individuals assumed, and were expected to keep, the occupations and roles into which they were born. The positive view of Icarus as the prototype of the scientist who dares to know comes out in Bruno, who, as Gatti has pointed out, shared the Neapolitan poet Tansillo's admiration for Icarus' daring, even though it led to death.[30] Francis Bacon also rejected the traditional interpretation of the Icarus myth in a passage that echoes Bruno:

> Icarus chose the better of the two [excess vs. defect]; for all defects are justly esteemed more depraved than excesses. There is some magnanimity in excess, that, like a bird, claims kindred with heavens: but defect is a reptile, that basely crawls upon the earth.[31]

Bruno rejects two other *loci classici* for the dangers of forbidden knowledge, the Genesis story of the forbidden fruit and the myth of Prometheus. Those who willingly accept limits to intellectual inquiry are "asses" in his opinion because

> they remain unable to stretch out their hands. . . like Adam to pluck the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, and in consequence they remain without the fruits of the tree of life, or to hold out their hands like Prometheus (which is a metaphor of the same kind) to take the fire of Jove to light the lamp of rational ability.[32]

We have seen how Knorr and van Helmont also believed the way to the Tree of Life was via the Tree of Knowledge.[33] Given the accumulated evidence it would appear that the Middle Ages was not fertile ground for the optimistic evaluation of human potential and power so forcefully presented in the writings of the Renaissance Neoplatonists and their followers.

There was, however, one medieval source for such ideas, and that was alchemy. Nicholas Clulee has criticized Yates for underestimating the influence that medieval alchemy and particularly Roger Bacon had in fostering an optimistic view of human potential. Clulee rejects the very term "Hermetic magic," as essentially meaningless.[34] The idea that medieval

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[28] For a provocative reading of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus as illustrating the conflict between Renaissance optimism and Christian pessimism, see Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge*, Chap. 4.

[29] Pico compares man to a chameleon and to Proteus in his Oration. He describes himself as Protean. See Giammatti, "Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance."

[30] Bruno commented on Tansillo's poem (*The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge*, p. 87).

[31] Cited in ibid., p.88.

[32] ibid., pp. 87-8.

[33] See ch. 7.

[34] Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion.*

alchemical writings are the place to look for a validation of technology and human potential has also been suggested by William Newman[35]

Stephen Clucas also argues that a positive attitude towards technology and the mechanical arts—what he describes as the "will to operate"—can be found in the thirteenth century and earlier in the *ars notoria*. Clucas suggests that scholars chart the history of "the will to perform," and he looks to Augustine as an important proponent of the proper use of human agency: "This belief in the legitimacy of pious or inspired agency, which is close to the Augustine's doctrine of 'legitimate use,' confirms that the notion of operativity was not absent from medieval and Renaissance culture, prior to Yates' magico-scientific 'operative' revolution—albeit it was heavily circumscribed."[36] To my mind this is precisely the point. Not only was the medieval notion of "operativity" heavily circumscribed but it was also qualitatively different from the notion that developed from the time of the Renaissance Platonists onwards. And in fairness to Frances Yates, it should be remembered that both alchemy and the *ars notoria* were identified with Hermes Trismegistus. Alchemy was known as the "Hermetic Art," and Hermes Trismegistus was its reputed founder. Hermes is also mentioned with respect in the notorious *Picatrix*. Furthermore, although the hermetic view of man as a potentially divine gnostic savior was an aspect of alchemy from its inception, this idea was transformed and strengthened from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.[37]

Yates' contention that Hermeticism provided the outlook and optimism conducive to the development of modern science is only one of several possible answers that have been given to the question of what caused the scientific revolution. The explanation most prevalent before hers was Protestantism. The thesis that Weber proposed linking Protestantism to the emergence of capitalism was adopted and adapted by many historians, who concluded that science, like capitalism, was the product of a Protestant ethic and mentality. Merton's essay was the first in a long line of books and articles that argued for a Protestant and particularly a "Puritan" origin of modern science.[38] But while it is generally admitted that science did not develop to the same extent in Catholic as in Protestant countries after the middle of the seventeenth century, it seems less and less convincing to argue that the reasons for this lie in specific theological doctrines. After all, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Mersenne, Pascal, and Descartes worked in a

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[35] Newman, "Technology and the Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages," pp. 424-5, 429.

[36] Clucas, "Wondrous Force and Operation: Renaissance Praxiology reassessed,.

[37] Mebane makes this point in *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare*, pp. 210-11, note 27. Gorceix also argues that only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when alchemy moved in many cases out of the laboratory altogether, did it provide the foundation for the belief in progress and positive attitude towards change that lie at the heart of the modern scientific world view. See *La Bible des Rose-Croix*.

[38] Key articles for and against the thesis appear in Cohen, ed., *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science: The Merton Thesis*.

Catholic environment, and the discoveries made largely by Catholic and continental mathematicians paved the way for the extraordinarily accomplishments of Newton.

The difficulty of asserting a direct link between theology and science had the effect of turning historians a hundred and eighty degrees in the opposite direction, to the point that some claimed science only emerged when religion issues were ignored. In the view of these historians, religious moderates and religious moderation laid the foundation for both the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment.[39] Trevor-Roper stated this position eloquently when he proposed that one look to Erasmus as the real progenitor of the enlightened scientific spirit with its combination of skepticism and a belief in the legitimacy of rational, critical inquiry.[40]

There is much to be said for this view. According to Thomas Sprat, the historian of the Royal Society, one of the stipulations of the Society was that religious issues should not be discussed by the members. But while moderation and an aversion for religious controversy may indeed have characterized the proponents of the new philosophy after it was in place, neither contributed to the new attitudes toward man, nature, and progress that provided the impetus for the scientific revolution itself. Erasmus was no Newton, nor even a Francis Bacon. And while he did advocate those aspects of mind essential to critical and methodical investigations of all kinds, there is no hint in his writing that man can and should transform his world as well as himself. It is virtually impossible to see Erasmus as the source for the kind of prophetic and millennial rhetoric one constantly meets in such thinkers as Bacon, Comenius, Hartlib, and the host of pansophic philosophers who did so much to popularize the view that science was the answer to human pain, discomfort, and distress. Even Boyle exhibits hints of enthusiasm when he argues that scientists are the true priests. In short, it is impossible to find in Erasmus' measured view of human potential the spirit of confidence that marks the work of seventeenth century scientists. The belief that reason combined with a method provided a virtually infallible formula for scientific discovery and progress became the accepted wisdom of the Enlightenment and subsequent centuries. And here I think we come back to the Yates thesis, for it is precisely this positive assessment of human potential that she stresses as so crucially important in providing the *sine qua non* for modern science. But perhaps instead of locating the source of this confidence in Hermeticism, or in the magical and occult traditions of the Renaissance, one might go a step further and find it in the revival of Pelagianism during the Renaissance. Friedrich Herr has suggested this in his book *Die Dritte Kraft*. Here he studies the attempts made by Humanists, frustrated by the latent Manichaeism of the Church and laity, to create a new Pelagian ethic.[41]

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[39] See, for example, Shapiro, "Latitudinarianism and Science." Mulligan, "Civil War Politics, Religion and the Royal Society."

[40] Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 232-3.

[41] Heer, *Die Dritte Kraft: Der europäische Humanismus zwischen den Fronten des konfessionellen Zeitalters*. Trinkhaus refers to the "rhetorical Pelagianism" of the Humanists *(In*

The revival of Pelagianism in the Renaissance is surely of great importance in shaping the emerging scientific mentality. But I would argue that the reason why Pelagianism came back into favor during this period was twofold: first, because of the rediscovery of classical texts embodying Greek and Roman scientific traditions, and, second, because of the revival of various forms of Gnosticism. In his now classic book *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom*, Eugene Rice traces the way in which the ideal of wisdom became increasingly secular under the impact of the rediscovery and absorption of classical texts during the Renaissance and later centuries. These texts precipitated a confrontation between philosophy and theology, science and religion, and encouraged a reevaluation of the goal and potential of human reason. A more positive view of both nature and human nature emerged from this confrontation. Among these rediscovered texts were, of course, the *Corpus Hermeticum* translated by Ficino. Although Plotinus accused Gnostics of despising the sensible world (*Enneads*, II, 9), this was not true of all Gnostics. In recent years, especially as a result of the gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi, certain Gnostics have been shown to have had a more optimistic world view, and this is the view that survived in the Hermetic texts translated by Ficino, in alchemy, in the Kabbalah, and, in Neoplatonism. In these sources one can find a "monadic gnosis,"[42] in which there was no chasm between man and God or need for a mediator between the two. Thus I would agree wholeheartedly with Trevor-Roper's suggestion that the origins of the Enlightenment are to be found in heresy.[43] The rediscovery of classical scientific texts and the revival of gnostic forms of

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Our Image and Likeness, 2: 633, 649) and suggests that hortatory writing of any sort presupposes some sort of Pelagianism.

[42] This term was used by Clement of Alexandria. See Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 31.

[43] Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 232-3: "Thus, when we look into the religious origins of the Enlightenment we do not discover them in any one Church or Sect. They are to be found in both Churches and in several sects. What is common to the men who express such ideas is that all of them are, in some sense, heretical. That is, they either belong to dissident groups within their Churches or are themselves regarded as unorthodox. The orthodox Churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist—look askance at them. Moreover, the heretical tradition which they share is not only independent of the Reformation from which it is so often supposed to have spring. It precedes the Reformation, and the Reformation, though it may at first have liberated it, has soon become a repressive movement, positively fragmenting and obstructing it. The intellectual tradition of scepticism, mysticism, critical scholarship, lay reason, free will, which was united in Erasmus was broken up and driven underground by the ideological struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What had once been a general movement within a united society, acceptable in the courts of princes and in the cathedrals of the established Church, became, under the impact of successive ideological struggles, a number of separate heresies, labeled with sectarian names and equally condemned by all right-minded members of the several religious establishments. In times of ideological peace, Olympian minds like those of Grotius or de Thou or Bacon would seek to reunite these ideas, to restore to them their original respectability, to develop them further. Once again princes and higher clergy would listen to them. But the return of religious war gave power to the radicals of orthodoxy; to the Calvinists who condemned Grotius in Holland, to the friars who condemned Galileo of Italy. The movement which might have been the orthodoxy of a united society became again heresies of divided Churches. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment, when it came, would be a reunion of all the heretics, the reintegration of a movement which religious revolution had arrested and transformed, but could not destroy."

thinking—whether they appear in the newly translated Hermetic texts, in alchemy, in Neoplatonism, or in the Kabbalah—led to the resurgence of the Pelagian heresy with its belief in the ability of man to determine his own destiny as well as that of the world's.

The gnostic part of my conclusion is not unique; it had been anticipated by Eric Voegelin over forty years ago. "[T]he essence of modernity," he wrote in *The New Science of Politics*, "[is] the growth of Gnosticism." Voegelin's analysis of Gnosticism is, however, very different from mine. Writing from the perspective of an Austrian who had watched European democratic institutions collapse in the face of Fascism and Communism, Voegelin quite understandably saw only one side of Gnosticism, the intolerant side stemming from the notion of the "godded man," who, in Voegelin's view, was more often a bigot than a saint.[44] But in stressing its totalitarian potential, Voegelin completely misses the other side of Gnosticism, the side represented by Pico della Mirandola when he proclaimed the ability of every man to realize his divine potential and the side represented by Bacon, Comenius, Hartlib, Van Helmont, von Rosenroth, Locke, Leibniz and the members of the numerous scientific and philosophical societies committed to the ideal of men working together for the common good. The forms of Gnosticism revived during and after the Renaissance (Hermeticism, alchemy, and the Kabbalah, especially the Lurianic Kabblah) were characterized by the democratic and egalitarian belief that individual men are basically good and capable of determining their own destiny. All of these gnostic philosophies were predicated on the possibility of universal salvation and the restoration of the world to its prelapsarian state. This is a very different philosophy from the totalitarian view which stresses the corporate identity of the individual and his subordination to society and the state.

Charles Webster has described the way our modern idea of progress developed from the belief in the return of an Edenic past.[45] McGuire and Rattansi wonder if this harking back to an idealized past, as Newton did, is characteristic of a pre-modern rather that a modern view.[46] But I would argue that Newton, like his contemporaries, was Janus-faced; they could look in both directions, but still anticipate improvements and advances never described in an ancient context. Leibniz believed in the *prisca theologia* just as much as Newton did, but he could envision submarines, airplanes, and all kinds of things absent from ancient texts.[47] For that matter, so could Roger Bacon and Leonard da Vinci. Past perfect and future perfect only began to be separated during Newton's lifetime. It would take the eighteenth century to accomplish this separation, at a cost well-documented by Romantics and conservatives of every subsequent generation.

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[44] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, p. 147. Vogelin's assessment of Gnosticism is similar to that of Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism."

[45] Webster, *The Great Instauration.*

[46] McGuire and Rattansi, "Newton and the Pipes of Pan," p. 127.

[47] Wiener, *Leibniz: Selections*, p. xxi.

What I propose in conclusion is that the Yates thesis is valid up to the point I suggested earlier. The remarkable upsurge in confidence and optimism Yates documents among the Renaissance Neoplatonists and which she attributed to Hermeticism, did exist; but could better be attributed to the rediscovery of classical scientific texts and to the revival of various forms of Gnosticism. Taking a lead from Moshe Idel, who has convincingly argued that Gnosticism is an integral part of Judaism, I suggest that Gnosticism is an integral part of Christianity as well.[48] For every theologian stressing the utter transcendence of God, there is a mystic who claims to have achieved union with the divine and even to have become divine. The Judeo-Christian doctrine that man was made in God's image spawned all kinds of heretical, gnostic, and Pelagian doctrines which, like Hydra heads, emerged and re-emerged through the centuries. In this sense Trinkhaus is entirely right to emphasize the biblical and patristic sources for the idea of man's greatness and ability. But these ideas were marginalized by the orthodox Church.[49] Thus, there was a religious antecedent that paved the way for the concentration on man and his potential in Eighteenth century thought, but it sprang from unorthodox roots. In one way or another, and from a wide variety of classical and gnostic sources, ideas arose minimizing or denying the orthodox Augustinian view that man could not be redeemed by his own efforts but only through Christ. As I have argued throughout this book, the Lurianic Kabbalah was one channel through which this gnostic and optimistic view of man passed into western culture. In this very important respect, early modern Christian culture is indebted to the Jewish and Converso theologians, philosophers, and scientists. in its midst, who shared their kabbalistic knowledge with Christians. Christian and Jewish relations may have been increasingly strained as racial prejudices intensified, but Jews and Christians continued to interact culturally in ways that profoundly influenced both communities.[50]

Gershom Scholem was the first twentieth century historian to argue for the importance of the Kabbalah in Jewish history and for the legitimacy of studying the Kabbalah within academic institutions. But because Scholem's philosophy of Jewish history rested on the assumption that forces within Jewish culture are sufficient to explain historical developments without recourse to foreign ideas or influences, the study of the Kabbalah was subsumed under the larger category of Jewish Studies, and consequently segregated from the wider fields of Religious Studies or Philosophy.[51] For Scholem, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain set off a chain reaction that led from the Lurianic Kabbalah, to Sabbatian Messianism, and finally to

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[48] Idel, Kabbalah; idem, "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism,.

[49] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels.*

[50] Ruderman, "Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages."

[51] Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*; Tirosh-Rothschild, "Review Essay: Continuity and Revision in the Study of the Kabbalah."

secularization and the Haskalah. Rather than a gradual progression, Scholem envisions Jewish history as a series of ruptures. This is especially true in the case of Sabbatianism, which Scholem contends destroyed Judaism from within. Thus, fervent, antinomian Messianism, when disappointed, led to its polar opposite, secularism and religious indifference. Scholem certainly recognized that the Kabbalah had been taken up by Christians early on, and his work on the origin of the Christian Kabbalah and on Christian Kabbbalists like Knorr von Rosenroth is exemplary. However, it was only with the generation of scholars following Scholem that the study of Jewish history in general and the Kabbalah in particular was fully integrated into the history of the larger communities in which Jews lived.

Scholem's internalist view of Jewish history fit comfortably with the tendency of other Jewish historians to treat the early modern period as an extension and intensification of the hostility between Christians and Jews characteristic of the late Middle Ages. Citing the continued expulsion of Jews from major centers of European culture and commerce, these historians argued that the Jews became more marginalized than ever since they were effectively barred from the economic, cultural, and intellectual developments marking the period from the Renaissance to the Eighteenth century.[52]

Jonathan Israel was one of the first scholars to challenge this view. In *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism* he instead emphasizes the reintegration of Jews into Western Europe during the early modern period and the positive effects this had on Jewish social and economic life.[53] Many scholars have taken the cultural aspect of this argument further by giving specific examples to show the substantial interaction between Christian and Jewish scientists, philosophers, and intellectuals in the early modern period.[54]

It is my hope that this book adds to this new assessment of Jewish-Christian relations in the early modern period by demonstrating that even in the face of very real anti-Semitism Christians and Jews interacted in ways that were extraordinarily significant for fostering the idea of progress and the ideal of toleration, twin pillars of our modern, secular and scientifically oriented society. In addition, I hope this book provides additional evidence that during this same period Messianism was transformed into a force for secularism and enlightenment. The experiences of a small but significant number of Jews and Christians converged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the customary link between national, political, and religious identity became strained to the breaking point. For certain individuals, Jewish and Christian history consequently followed a similar path, from a religious ideology based on exclusivity and Messianic expectation to one of tolerance, and from a view of history focused on a forfeited, ideal past to one based on the idea of continual progress and non-

[52] On this point see Ruderman's review of Israel's book (see next footnote) in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1987): 154-59.

[53] Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*.

[54] See, for example, the works of Idel, Popkin, Katz, Ruderman, Beitchman, van der Wall, Goldish, Berti, and de León-Jones cited in the bibliography.

Messianic redemption. In the course of the foregoing chapters, I have tried to illustrate the ways in which contact between Christians and Jews promoted skepticism and secularization on both sides of the religious divide and to show how Christian and Jewish millenarianism, and not the kind of radical Messianism characteristic of Sabbatianism, fostered the conviction that man could improve himself and his environment.

Most scholars have rejected Scholem's contention that the antinomian excesses of Sabbatianism undermined Judaism and encouraged secularism in favor of a sociological explanation: secularization was largely the result of increased social and intellectual contact with Christians. Paradoxically, one of the reasons for this increased contact was the growth of intolerance. The intolerance of the early modern period had a similar effect on many Jews and Christians. The streamlining of states along religious lines led to forced as well as voluntary conversions among both groups, which meant that many Christians and Jews shared the experience of what Peter Berger has described as "alternation." Stephen Sharot describes the crisis of identity and rootlessness this engendered among some Marranos:

> They had passed between logically contradictory intellectual universes. What was peculiar about the former Marranos was that they experienced alternation in a largely traditional society, a society of closed and binding world views in which people were assigned definite and permanent identities. The Christian and Jewish worlds in the seventeenth century were separated by legal, cultural, and social barriers; Jews and Christians had little contact beyond formal economic and political relationships, and each group regarded the other as another species of being. In such a society alternation caused acute problems of identity and location in society. Many former Marranos retained a nostalgia for the land of their births, and a few returned despite the dangers. Some retained a fondness for Catholicism, a few returning to the religion of their childhood. Others, identifying strongly with Judaism, felt an overwhelming sense of guilt and sought pardon for their Catholic past by such practices as wearing hair shirts.[55]

The same sense of deracination and loss of identity plagued many Christians forced to convert as regimes became more intolerant. The doctrine of *cuius regio, eius religio* led to great confusion as populations were required to convert when their rulers, or the religion of their rulers, changed. The problem of religious identity was equally perplexing in those areas where religious conformity could not be enforced. In Holland or England, where a smorgasbord of religious ideologies was available, the very fact that choice was possible proved unsettling, and there are cases of people moving back and forth between denominations and even religions. To take the admittedly extreme case of Johann Peter Späth: born a Catholic, he converted to Lutheranism, only to return again to Catholicism for a short time, at which point he started reading Jacob Boehme and joined with Mennonites and Socinians in Amsterdam. While there he became involved with Christian

[55] Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic*, p. 108.

Kabbalists, which eventually led to his conversion to Judaism.[56] In many ways Späth's religious odyssey parallels Uriel da Costa's; both men were unable to accommodate to the demands of institutionalized religion, whether Christian or Jewish, or in da Costa's case both Christian and Jewish! Da Costa's suicide and Späth's rejection of Christianity indicate the extreme anguish that religious skepticism caused in a period in which religious impulses and religious institutions were in many cases poles apart. In the same way that Späth belonged to the burgeoning number of Christians "sans église,"[57] Da Costa belonged to the growing number of Conversos "sans église" and, one might say, "sans synagogue" as well.[58]

Many Christians experienced the same acute religious anxiety as Späth and Da Costa, although few went as far as to renounce Christianity and Judaism altogether or commit suicide. For example, some thirty-nine German Princes, a number of high-ranking French Protestants, and Queen Christina converted to Catholicism during the seventeenth century. Among these was Christian August of Sulzbach, as we have seen. Christian August's spiritual turmoil and psychological collapse before his conversion to Catholicism is indicative of the anxiety caused by the radical political, social, and religious changes of the times. While many converts undoubtedly adapted to their new religions, a significant number did not. As a result of forced or voluntary conversions they, too, had to confront the question of what religion, if any, offered the truth and, indeed, whether truth was absolute, relative, or simply unknowable. Like the Conversos, their experiences could lead to the kind of skeptical outlook and a non-dogmatic, essentially non-denominational religion that came to characterize Deism, if not to outright skepticism or atheism.

In important ways the Reformation had the unintended effect of bringing Christians into closer contact with Jews than ever before. Luther's insistence that Scripture alone was the word of God encouraged Protestants to turn to Jewish commentaries when the text proved difficult to understand. The Protestant search for "real" Christianity—meaning, before it had been corrupted by the Catholic Church—also encouraged a closer look at Jewish sources, and this led many Christians to "Judaize" in the manner of the Sabbatarians. The study of early Christian history created greater awareness about the way key Christian concepts, such as Jesus's nature, and fundamental doctrines, like the Trinity and the atonement, had evolved over time. This realization encouraged, in turn, a skeptical, less dogmatic approach to doctrine. Christian Kabbalists provide a further example of how

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[56] Cf. Coudert, "Judaizing in the Seventeenth Century: Francis Mercury van Helmont and Johann Peter Späth (Moses Germanus)."

[57] Kolakowski, L. *Chrétiens sans Église.*

[58] Da Costa, *A Specimen of Human Life.* This book was published by Limborch as an appendix to his *De Veritate Religionis Christianae Amica Collaio cum Erudito Judaeo* to bolster his own case for the superiority and truth of Christianity. Bodian claims that the work is "unreliable (and partly spurious)" (*Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, p. 120); Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église.*

dangerous the Protestant rallying cry of "sola scriptura" proved to be for dogmatic assertions of any kind. As we have seen, the kind of Christianity embraced by the Sulzbach Kabbalists was highly unorthodox and unacceptable to most Christians because it rejected the conventional view of the fall, salvation, and the Trinity, not to mention the more specifically Protestant emphasis on divine justice, predestination, and man's helplessness. Francis Mercury van Helmont and Christian August came to embrace the view that any one could be saved no matter what their religion, a conviction that completely destroyed the rationale for any form of institutionalized Christianity predicated on the belief in the exclusive nature of Christian truth..

The conversion of Johann Peter Späth to Judaism was precipitated by his experience in Sulzbach, where he had come to help in the editing and publication of the *Kabbala denudata*. The tendency of the Christian Kabbalists there to attenuate Christian doctrine by either explaining it allegorically or dismissing it altogether contributed to the further undermining of Späth's Christian convictions, while his contact with Jews and Jewish sources provided the final coup de grace. Späth eventually came to the conclusion that if Christians disagreed so fundamentally among themselves and if Christian Kabbalists appropriated Jewish philosophy for their own purposes, while discarding Christian fundamentals, perhaps the real kernel of truth lay in the Judaism from which Christianity arose. Herman van der Hardt, the professor of oriental languages and librarian at Helmstedt, suggested that this was indeed Späth's reasoning when he described Späth as concluding, after a long internal battle, that, "everything is uncertain except this: God is certainly one."[59] Späth consequently had himself circumcised and assumed the name Moses Germanus.

Moses Germanus provides an example of the way increasing contact between Christians and Jews in the early modern contributed to religious skepticism. In important respects his criticism of Christianity anticipated ideas that became commonplace in the following century. With his dual background he was able to attack Christianity from the perspectives of both its Christian and Jewish critics. From the Jewish perspective, he repeatedly argues that Christians have misunderstood and misinterpreted Old Testament Messianic prophecies. By showing that these prophecies are not fulfilled in the New Testament, he, along with other Jewish critics of Christianity, effectively separated the Old and New Testaments, thus removing the historical and theological rationale for Christianity. Once this was done, it was possible for other questions to be asked. For example, what was the historical and theological basis of the New Testament? Did Jesus really

[59] Van der Hardt made this observation in a conversation he had with Gottlieb Stolle. See Guhrauer, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss des 17. u. 18. Jahrhunderts aus den handschriflichen Aufzeichungen Gottlieb Stolle's," p. 403.

exist? And was he anything more than a Jewish prophet preaching to messianically inclined Jews?[60]

Moses Germanus makes all these points in his self appointed role as biblical critic. He dismissed the Christian Church as a gross fraud and invention from the period of Constantine. The core of Jesus's teaching in the New Testament came from Jewish oral tradition, which was deposited in the Mishnah and Talmud.[61] Therefore everything valid in Christianity originated in Judaism. What was invalid—for example, the cult of Saints, adoration of the host, and worship of a human being—came from idolatrous Paganism.[62] Moses Germanus accused the Catholic Church of being a "God-maker" ("Gottermacherin") and dismissed the Papal throne as a "Seat of Pestilence" ("Stuhl der Pestilenz").[63] In his opinion the Christian martyrs of the early centuries were really Jews.

As we have seen, the secularization process arising from the encounter between Jews and Christians cut both ways. Obviously many other factors fostered secularization, but it is important not to lose sight of the religious roots of the process or the part Jewish-Christian relationships, and particularly the Kabbalah, played in it.

Scholars who deny Scholem's contention that there is a correlation between Jewish Messianism and Jewish secularism claim that Sabbatian Messianism was an aberration and distortion of kabbalistic thinking with little direct relation to the Lurianic Kabbalah. In their view the link between the Kabbalah and the Enlightenment does not include Sabbatian messianism but the non-messianic, personal and activist form of millenarianism characteristic of the Lurianic Kabbalah.[64]

Messianism is not emphasized in the Lurianic Kabbalah nor is apocalypticism. Moshe Idel argues that Sabbatai Sevi was "non-Lurianic, not to say anti-Lurianic," and contends that Lurianic Kabbalah was neither as original as Scholem thought nor as widespread. [65] Stephen Sharot and David Biale also reject the idea that messianism is emphasized in the Lurianic Kabbalah. Biale goes as far as to claims that the Lurianic Kabbalah is anti-messianic and anti-apocalyptic since the notion of restoration, or *Tikkun*, is described as a gradual process, predicated on the dedicated work of generations of devoted worshipers and not on the coming of the Messiah:

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[60] Popkin, "Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments"; idem, Skepticism about Religion and Millenarian Dogmatism: Two Sources of Toleration in the Seventeenth Century."

[61] This idea completely reversed the medieval notion that the Mishnah and Talmud were fictive additions to the Old Testament purposefully written by the Jews to distort the obvious Christological meanings of the text. Cf. Jeremy Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy." On Späth, see Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock*, pp. 67ff.

[62] Schudt, *Compendium Historiae Judaicae. . .* , I: 694; J. G. Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, p. 30.

[63] Supellex epistolica Uffenbachii der Staatsbibliothek Hamburg, v. 26, fol. 57.

[64] Taubes goes as far as to argue that far from leading to the Enlightenment Sabbatianism delayed it ("The Price of Messianism," p. 555).

[65] Idel, "'One from a Town, Two from a Clan'—the Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination," pp. 84-85.

> The person of the Messiah was of little importance to Luria. Since redemption does not come "suddenly, like a thief in the night," but in a long, gradual process extending back to creation. Luria gave men an active role in the restoration of the divine sparks: each generation must fulfill its quota of "restorations." Against the belief of some secularists that Jewish messianism was always passive in the Middle Ages, Scholem's repeated emphasis on Luria's importance reveals the profoundly activist potentiality in mysticism. If the early Kabbalah was quietistic, it ultimately developed into a mystical doctrine teaching man's active role in the cosmos.[66]

The activism of the Lurianic Kabbalah distinguishes it from the passivity that generally accompanies extreme messianic and apocalyptic thinking.

Werblowsky and Idel have also emphasized the activist, theurgic aspect of kabbalistic mysticism. Idel, as we have seen, describes the kabbalistic view of man's cosmic role as "universe maintenance activity."[67] Werblowsky emphasizes the fact that in the Lurianic scheme man in a very real sense becomes the savior of God:

> This is spiritual activism at its most extreme, for here God has become a real *salvator salvandus*. But to the Jew, Israel's exile became meaningful because it was seen as a participation in the profounder exile of God, and God Himself required Israel's active participation in the redemption of Himself and His people. It is not surprising that in this kabbalistic system the personality of the messiah played a relatively minor role. He was not so much a redeemer as a sign and symbol that the redemptive process has been achieved. In fact, the messianic doctrine of Lurianic Kabbalah comes close to the structure of an evolutionist scheme.[68]

The Lurianic Kabbalist could not retreat into his own private world. He had to participate in a cosmic millennial drama in which his every action counted. The Lurianic Kabbalah was the first Jewish theology which envisioned perfection in terms of a future state, not in terms of a forfeited ideal past, and as such it contributed to the idea of progress emerging in the West.

David Ruderman has shown that there was no conflict between the Kabbalah and science. On the basis of sound evidence, he refutes the idea propounded by Barzilay that the Lurianic Kabbalah was totally at odds with science and only led to superstition and witchcraft.[69] As Ruderman says, "In reality no 'pure Kabbalist' or, for that matter, 'pure rationalist' was visible in Italian Jewish culture."[70] He reiterates a point made repeatedly in the last thirty years by historians of science that it is impossible to pigeon-hole early modern intellectuals—whether Christian or Jewish—into such categories as "rationalists," empiricists," "mystics," or "occultists" because they lived in a

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[66] Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, p. 157.

[67] Idel, *Kabbalah*, ch. 8.

[68] Werblowsky, "Messianism in Jewish History, in Marc Saperstein, ed., *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, p. 48. Cf. Ruderman, "Hope against Hope," especially pp. 313ff.

[69] Ruderman, *Kabblah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Univrese of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician*; idem, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*; idem, *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham Hananiah Yagel*.

[70] ibid., p. 120.

period when science relied on all kinds of sources and methodologies, including occult and prophetic ones.[71] Ruderman gives the following evocative example of two Jewish intellectuals, who were supposed to be at loggerheads, meeting to investigate the way natural phenomena reaffirmed their faith:

> The scenario of the Kabbalist Basilea, crouched in a darkened room with one of Venice's most distinguished rabbis, R. Jacob Aboab, examining the effect of light rays through a narrow opening in the window, performing a scientific experiment to reaffirm the truth of their sacred tradition, is as revealing a snapshot as any regarding the complexity of the Jewish intellectual ambiance in the Italian ghettos in the Eighteenth century and the place of science in that setting.[72]

Alexander Altmann and Moshe Idel have also illustrated the syncretistic nature of Jewish culture in the Renaissance and early modern periods by showing the way kabbalistic thinkers integrated Neoplatonism, magic, and science into their study of Kabbalah. Herrera is a case in point. In his own kabbalistic writings he refers to the Florentine Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Israel Sarug had also set out to teach the Kabbalah in a philosophical and essentially Neoplatonic manner.

It is clear that for Jewish Kabbalists, science and mysticism were compatible. What is not so clear is whether Jewish Kabbalists actually took the kabbalistic notion of *tikkun*, or restoration, as a mandate for an active attempt to reform and improve the world in the same way that Christian Kabbalists did, especially the Sulzbach Kabbalists. Ruderman thinks that the link Abraham Yagel tried to forge between the Kabbalah and science broke assunder as Lurianic Kabbalah increasingly stressed ritual activism rather than theosophical speculation.[73] But for at least some seventeenth century Christian and Jewish Kabbalists the notion of *tikkun* changed from the idea of "man saving God" to "man saving himself and the universe." This shift from the divine to the human plane also occurred among Christian millenarians and messianists. As Charles Webster pointed out some twenty years ago, English and continental Christian millenarians increasingly believed that human beings could hasten the advent of the millennium by employing science and technology for "the relief of man's estate."[74] For both Christians and Jews, failed messianic dreams gave way to a new and more optimistic vision of man, a view that in many cases led them to reject the concepts of original sin, an eternal hell, and an irredeemably corrupt world. Millenarian expectations thus contributed to the enlightenment belief in science as a progressive social force. Even heaven would benefit from the endeavors of scientists, who, as Bishop Burnet suggested, would continue to be entertained on high with "little inventions in mathematics, or mechanics,

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[71] Ruderman, *A Valley of Vision*, p. 217.

[72] ibid., p. 222.

[73] ibid., p. 15; for a more extensive discussion on this point see Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*.

[74] *The Great Instauration.*

or natural philosophy."[75] What is so interesting is that many of these Christian millenarians were well acquainted with Jewish and Christian Kabbalists in Amsterdam and Sulzbach.[76] The Kabbalah, especially in the non-messianic but millenarian form of the Lurianic Kabbalah, offered a bridge between these Christians and Jews; it allowed them to exchange ideas in an arena that lacked the traditionally harsh and uncompromising lines drawn between the two groups. In the course of these exchanges many ideas arose that reinforced the best and most progressive ideals of Western thought: ecumenism, toleration, and the belief that all men had the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

When I first described van Helmont's kabbalistic theories in a lecture at the Warburg Institute many years ago, I was somewhat taken aback when the very first question I was asked was, "Do you think he was insane?" To someone living in the twentieth century he may well appear to have been, but for those who have spent time reading about the bitter and bloody religious battles of the early modern period, not to mention the conflicts still going on today, van Helmont's philosophy comes as a breath of fresh air. Even someone like Henry More, who disagreed with him, had no doubts about his basic goodness, honesty, and humanity. Just thinking about van Helmont's good qualities brought tears to More's eyes as they parted from one another after a visit. As he wrote Anne Conway, ". . . he has a hearte so good, so kind, so officious, so plaine and simple, and so desirous of the publick good that the consideration of that. . . putt me into such a passion of joy and benignity, that I could not for my life keep my eyes from letting down teares." It took the good services of Lord Conway to calm More with a can of Norden ale and a glass of canary, and More excused himself by saying that as a chemist, van Helmont could draw moisture from flint.[77]

[75] Quoted in Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, p. 125.

[76] Van den Berg and van der Wall, eds., *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*; Wappmann, *Durchbruch zur Toleranz*.

[77] *CL*, p. 329.

APPENDIX ONE

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO VAN HELMONT'S IMPRISONMENT BY THE INQUISITION[1]

I. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

DOCUMENT I

Cardinal Francesco Barberini's Instruction for the Nuncio Marcus Gallio, (Rome, November, 19, 1661)[2]

I have been apprised by my Supreme Eminences and the General Inquisitors of an affair of great importance, that Francis van Helmont dared to attempt to convert the Palatine Count of Sulzbach from the Catholic faith, to which he was newly converted. And they have greatly praised the zeal and piety of the Duke of Neuburg for turning against the said Francis Mercury, even [to the point of] putting him in prison when he returned from Amsterdam. But because the importance of the person, who is a famous doctor, and the liberty of the country where he resides could hinder such a just resolution, especially if it became known that this same Holy Seat, whose office it is [to do this], had a hand in an affair which runs the risk of not turning out as hoped, their Excellencies have decided that I should suggest to you the following considerations.

1. That the capture of Francis Mercury be accomplished through the command of the Duke and his ministers, who can say that it was done as a matter of state or for some other political reason without anyone realizing that you had a hand in it.

2. Once captured, that he should be incarcerated in a secure place under the same decree in order that he may come, if possible, into the power of the Sacred Office.

3. And since you indicate that fellow is not only suspected of heresy but also of judaizing, it will be necessary to fabricate a juridical process concerning this and to investigate witnesses who must be found, if it is possible, who are persons of impeccable faith and who do not have any familiar relationship or friendship with him, so that you can probably assure yourself that they will keep the matter secret. For those [people], in addition to an oath of silence, an excommunication order of great latitude could be issued, reserving absolution to Our Lord and that Sacred Congregation for not revealing anything which is contained in their testimony or pertaining to the case.

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[1] Printed in Jaitner, "Der Pfalz-Sulzbacher Hof in der europäischen Ideengeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts," pp. 395-404.

[2] Archivo Segreto Vaticano, Archivio della Nunziatura di Colonia 81.

4. However, caution must be exercised in appointing the judge who will have to examine the witnesses, because, were he appointed by the Duke, the evidence that is extracted from the testimony of the witnesses given in his presence will be worthless because of the incapacity of a lay judge to understand and meddle with spiritual matters such as those of heresy and apostasy from the faith. Wherefore it is necessary that he [the judge] be appointed either by you or by a Bishop. Such a choice must be made secretly and, if done by you, do it with one written agreement signed by you yourself without the intervention of another person, so that, consequently, any necessary authority will appear to come from God.

5. It is agreed that these witnesses will be examined according to these precepts, that they are to examine only those witnesses who are either informed about the professed heresy of the said Francis Mercury or about the acts of Judaizing practiced by him. And, since they are diverse persons, their depositions are to be taken separately.

6. Before examining witnesses about the attempted subversion of the Catholic faith of the Palatine Count, you should consult the Sacred Congregation concerning what will be examined concerning the other two points of heresy and of Judaizing in order to act afterwards in accordance with their regulations.

7. But because there are many people with the authority to bring it about that Francis Mercury be freed from prison, and, if [one of these] is by chance from Holland, such officials could affect and threaten the Duke or even, with an unfair diversion, abuse the Catholics who live in Holland, you should therefore consider that if such dangers may affect you, it would be better perhaps that neither the Duke nor the Sacred Congregation involve themselves in such a dangerous affair, but that it would be more expedient if Your Grace attempted in a more pleasing manner to rescue the Palatine Count from the conversion [attempt] of that man and to replace him with some learned and pious Catholic, who would strengthen him in the true faith, which he has embraced, and remove those shadows and scruples with which that scoundrel has clouded his mind.

8. In any case, if the Duke should resolve to proceed to that imprisonment and if from that trial, which will be prepared, grave indictments of heresy and apostasy from the faith should emerge against the said Francis Mercury, it will be necessary that that person arrive in time and at an opportune place where the Sacred Office can exercise its jurisdiction freely, since there [where he is now] he could not ordinarily be punished.

9. Everything which concerns this matter and which you will do in this affair should be communicated to the Holy Office.

DOCUMENT 2:

Informatio de Helmontio (May/June 1662)[3]

Francis Mercury van Helmont, doctor and alchemist, following his inner light (some fifth essence), seems to have attached himself to new beliefs from a variety of religions (since he is a critic and scoffer of all of them). [He is] a man who wanders about, an attendant in the courts of idle princes, among whom he represents himself as a Catholic, even appearing to confess and take communion, because if he openly professed another religion, he would not be able to take shelter in the courts of many princes. But at the same time he accuses the Catholic Church of errors and is thus agreeable and accepted by non Catholics, and, like a chameleon, when he wishes he takes on various religious colors. Among the Hebrews he lives in this way, so that at some time there was a public report that he had been circumcised. He is also a friend of Anabaptists and Quakers, whose opinions, if he does not follow them, nevertheless he not only praises them greatly on account of their wool working and other customary skills, but, when he can, he lives with them familiarly. He is trying to bring [them] from Holland, where the seeds of all heresies sprout forth with impunity, into the courts of princes or into the states and cities ruled by them. Yea, he had the temerity and impudent audacity to induce a certain prince of the Roman Empire to travel incognito with him in Holland to see in person how Quakers, Jews, and Anabaptists carry out their devotions from the light within and busy themselves with madness. Then he brought to Sulzbach a colony of Hebrews, Anabaptists, and especially Quakers (under the name of Dutch or Dutch Lutheran artisans), who have been educated in diverse trades and equally educated to have assemblies by the instinct of the light within, which, they say, they hear inside and are moved by. They use no other books than Tauler, who is even criticized by Luther, and, as they say, published in a corrected edition, and also a certain Matthew Weyer, Jacob Boehme, and books of Luther, which are read in a loud voice at the table of the Catholic prince by Helmont's authority. These books are secretly recommended to Catholics. It was not permitted for any bookseller, under the gravest penalty, to show for inspection to any man any page of these books or of any others carried off from Holland by these dregs of men until Helmont ordered it. The non-Catholic artisans invited to Sulzbach (to the number of twenty families), having set up workshops in separate houses, even began to frequent the court itself, evidently so that the prince might be induced to work among them more easily, and they began to shun the courts, which look after the public administration and the good government of its subjects. And so that the sons of the citizens might thoroughly learn the arts of these craftsmen, the schools are deserted and the education of the youth begins to be neglected so that the citizens are compelled more easily to apply their sons to the learning of these new crafts, so that they are steeped in the poison of the new religion. In order

[3] ibid.

that the appearance of the old religion might remain, since the greater part of the Bible is written in the Hebrew language, they learn and teach the Hebrew language, in which both the prince and his daughters are steeped, first in the early morning for one or two hours. Next, everyone goes to work, taking up his weaving or some other craft. Finally, they approach the kitchen pots (a shameful matter) to cook their food and they dare to invite the prince himself on the authority of Helmont, so that he might eat (says that teacher) of the labor of his hands and according to the Apostle: he who does not work, does not eat. Immediately afterwards they run to and from through the workshops of the different craftsmen; nay, there is not a worker among them who does not work as smiths at the anvil with their hammers grasped or draw thread with the cobblers so that, in this manner, just as Anabaptists say, they might put charity and duty before profit. Now and then they suddenly rush into the woods so that they may see the inner light and be moved to speech by it. They say among themselves that in the midst of their work they see visions of angels, wonderful evidence on account of which they teach that princes ought to abandon the management of their affairs, that they ought not to hamper these illuminations of the soul with any consideration of justice or for any other reason.

It should be noted:

Helmont will be captured quickly through conversation as he says who he is. If he is interrogated about the faith which he holds, he immediately says Catholic. He will not be able to explain this without error. He says that he hates all other sects and he will not lie because he believes what he pleases from each one, although he will not confess this.

The Errors and Teachings of Helmont:

1. He is accustomed to say that there is no learned man or teacher besides Christ. He adds that no one is learned or holy.

2. He persuaded someone [Christian August] to call back his daughters from Belgium, where they were educated virtuously as Catholics, desiring them to learn to see visions from the light within at home near their father and without teachers.

3. He blamed a certain nobleman [Christian August] because having converted from Lutheranism, he made a profession of the Catholic faith, which was not necessary. He turned the same man away from a good intention with the result that he did not promulgate the new Gregorian calendar among his subjects.

4. Occasionally he was heard to say that anyone is able to be saved in his own faith according to his own inner light and the light of conscience.

5. He secretly led a certain prince, converted to the Catholic faith, into Transylvania, Moravia, Bohemia, and Holland and there promised him that he would truly discover faithful Christians. As an intimate friend of that prince, he is thought to have arranged, by means of his advice, first, that the

prince sent away the Jesuits, then the Capuchins, and finally he brought in Jews and Dutch craftsmen, who now live in the house in which the Jesuits formerly lived.

6. He wished to persuade the same prince that no one is permitted to enjoy six horses and a four-wheel carriage or to live in the customary fashion of other princes, but that he must spend his life working and laboring like ordinary citizens.

7. He said that no man should be believed, even though he took an oath; therefore no one should require an oath because it could not hold.

8. He thought that crimes should not be punished and he tried to prove that a magistrate might actually take no notice of the worst crimes of the flesh and that incest and adultery might remain unpunished and that a certain mother who killed her son might be freely discharged without punishment. Indeed, no one was permitted to condemn another to death.

9. He teaches that the Bible was not correctly translated. Therefore it is necessary to learn the Hebrew language thoroughly to understand the true meaning. Moreover, that many books in the Bible ought to be burned because the teachings derived from these books were hateful, except for that which was revealed and taught about the inner light.

10. He is accustomed to speak insultingly of the Catholic religion and Catholic church, of its hierarchy, clergy, and ceremonies, and he ascribed to pride and avarice the very costly garments in churches and he censures other fundamentals [of the Church].

11. He does not show respect for princes. When he wrote letters to that prince, whose friend he was and whom he led through various countries and confused with new opinions, he did not begin with any title but merely with, "I have received your letter." Nor did he sign his name.

Summary

Whatever things are revealed to Helmont by the inner light are nothing but trifling, laughable matters of a very dark mind—for example, the filthy pig pens, which, like a murderous money-lender [sicarius negotiator], Helmont tried to persuade the prince to build in abundance (within the palace grounds), where the flock of pigs might feed. Thus, the courtyard of the prince would look like a farm or rustic dwelling.

On account of these and similar things, from which scandal has arisen and disgrace ought to be cast upon the names of great princes, in addition to the serious damage to the spirit and faith, various princes have decided that Helmont must be excluded from the common crowd of men and from the company of princes and taken in chains for his betterment and correction.

DOCUMENT 3:

Discourse of the most serene [Prince of] Sulzbach with Herr Johann Abraham Poemer about what he ascertained about his discourse with the Duke of Neuburg[4]

Your Highness regretted that His Highness of Neuburg did show such little affection and esteem while Your Highness did exercise all reverence and patience and sought to serve Your Princely Highness as a friend and cousin. . . . You did admit that Your Highness' greatest hurt lay in the fact that Herr. v. Hellmont was taken prisoner for your sake, had not been taken before a judge, had neither been arraigned nor found guilty and was to be led from Germany to the Inquisition. For all these reasons your conscience claimed redress and you demanded that he be set free. However, let the lord who judges fairly and can demand redress for Herr von Hellmont's false imprisonment and also the Holy Roman Empire whose interests are at stake, consider this occurrence. (You said) that you lacked the might to withstand such a powerful prince, tied as he is to relatives of royal and electoral parentage, and that you desired peace rather than disquiet. However, as far as honor and reputation were concerned, Your Highness would not cede place to anyone. . . . As to what HIs Highness [Duke of Neuburg] has heard and seen of Herr van Hellmont, he is a blameless knight and that even though his morals are not the usual ones, neither the Elector of Mainz nor of the Palatine has taken objec-tion to them. He is neither a heretic nor a seducer. Whoever takes him to be such, let him prove it. On this score the Holy Roman Empire had conducted itself wisely, justly, and with magnanimity. If Your Highness [Christian August] had had any inkling to the contrary, he would have given him friendly warning and never have been party to it. And, as Herr von Hellmont would readily confirm, You [Christian August] had never voiced any religious doubts and that wherever you went and with whomsoever you had dealings, your conduct has been that of a good Catholic and that You had been present at various times when Herr von Hellmont had conducted himself similarly. If this meets with disbelief, no one but God himself could possibly bring about a change of thought. Not ever Our Savior could do it when the Pharisees wanted to coerce him to accept the devil and Beelzebub as his masters. Therefore, you never felt any call to attract Quakers or fanatics. No one could truthfully aver the contrary, let alone make out that you went to the Netherlands for this reason.

[4] BHstA Munchen, Pfaltz-Neuburg Nr. 654.

DOCUMENT 4:

Indictment of the Inquisition, Rome 5 July 1662[5]

Reverend Petrus Serista, fiscal administrator of the Holy Roman Inquisition, personally appears before the Congregation of the General, Holy, Roman, and Universal Inquisition, residing in the convent of the Blessed Mary over the temple of Minerva in the presence of the most eminent and reverent Cardinals of the Holy Church with the General Inquisitors having been specially assigned by the Holy Apostolic Seat in the entire Christian realm [to act] against depraved heresy. He officially sets forth that it has come to his knowledge, not indeed from malicious or suspicious persons but rather from people worthy of trust, that Francis Mercury van Helmont, born in Brussels and educated in the Catholic Church, has held and taught respectively the propositions written below, namely:

1. It is reported that Francis Mercury van Helmont, whose father was a doctor in Brussels, grew up as a young boy in the service of the Spanish Count de Claravalle addicted to heterodox opinions.

2. There are twelve years during which he sallied forth from there into upper Germany. Running and rambling about the courts of various princes, scattering certain singular alchemical secrets and the teachings of a strange faith, he entered the holy temples of the Apostles and wandered through the territory of the Holy, Roman Church and the whole of Italy. Under the false color of a traveler, in the guise of a Franciscan, he obfuscated (in the Empire and everywhere else) the correct opinion about himself and his perverse faith, showing by this that he is an idle vagabond, a wanderer favoring no certain sort of life.

3. While thus wandering and spending time now among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, now among Quakers, Anabaptists or Hebrews, he adapted his faith to the faiths of all. It is not surprising if he said to wise and pious princes that he was suspected of favoring any new and plainly unknown religion or (which is more to be feared) atheism.

4. Among others, he devoted himself to a certain prince of the Roman Empire (well known to Helmont himself), whom he enticed by his seeming honesty and false teachings, so that together with him he believed that true Christians were not found in these parts, but he thought they must be searched for elsewhere. Accordingly, this wandering vagrant took the said Duke, incognito, away from his wife and children and unknowing subjects to seek the brothers of the Rosy Cross, men whose repute has been defamed, as he says, and groups of a similar character in Transylvania, Hungary, Bohemia, and Moravia, and similar non-Catholic places.

5. Afterwards, having returned and claiming to be the companion and brother of the Prince, not his guest, he brought about a grave crisis for that Prince by the false errors of his teaching that it was nearly a universal

[5] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Archivio della Nunziatura di Colonia 81.

opinion, according to him [Helmont], that neither fornication, incest, nor adultery (Genesis, ch. 38), indeed, no wrong doing whatsoever should be punished. He calmly defended this position, so that it soon happened that this doctrine was fastened, by order of the superiors, to the accustomed doors of the Chancellery and courts just like a new decree or statue. Immediately afterwards, a certain woman, accused of killing her own child and publicly and openly convicted, was set free with impunity.

6. Beyond this, he attempted to persuade all the subjects of the aforementioned Prince that orators or preachers of the divine word of whatever religion, who use books to preach and not pure, infused grace, should not to be held in any esteem.

7. Moreover, he has not feared[6] to declare publicly that all the writings of authors and interpreters about the divine and holy Scriptures should be wiped out and burned, one sole authority remaining, which van Helmont himself composed, which, reducing sacred writings to one, hands down more than sufficiently a rule for living a good life.

8. Further, he affirmed that the sacred scriptures were not translated according to the true and genuine sense of the original language, but he affirmed that he would be able to translate them correctly from the Hebrew language, which he knew well.

9. Similarly, he has professed at the table of the Count Ambergensis that confession and the doctrine of the divine Eucharist is unnecessary and superfluous because, returning to an earlier sin, an individual falls once more, and thus the divine majesty would be much more enraged.

10. He maintained vehemently that our baptism with material water is not necessary, but it is sufficient for a man if he marks himself with the character of a Christian by engaging rightly in good works with a certain inner fervor.

11. The same Helmont maintains without doubt that anyone in his own faith, of whatever kind, may be saved.

12. It is a doctrine of Helmont that the bodies of the blessed saints are preserved from corruption by a natural and not a miraculous power, which opinion he defended in the presence of the most serene Duke of Neuburg with Reverent Father Otterstet and the Dominican Doctor Weibel present.

13. A renowned person will testify against van Helmont on this matter, that he maintained that splendid sanctuaries and ornate basilicas should not be built for the divine majesty but the simple chapels of Capuchins to appease the common people.

14. Had he lived, the noble Lord Philip Otto from Herzelles, formerly an advisor to the most eminent Elector of Maguntini and sent away to a monastery in Frankfurt, would have spoken about many of Helmont's heinous teachings, which he attempted to instill in this man more than once; namely: that those things must not be believed which the sacred Catholic Church teaches about the conception, nativity, passion, and resurrection of Christ, our Savior. All these things should be understood allegorically, not

[6] Reading "nec veritus est" for "nec veritas est."

literally—that Christ is daily conceived, born, suffers, dies, and rises again in true Christians, that is in Helmontians. Nor should it be understood otherwise concerning the most sacred Virgin, which the aforementioned Herzelles said that he had heard van Helmont say to various people consistently on more than one occasion. The Elector of Maguntinus and the Dominican Breuing, a doctor of theology and a parish priest and teacher in the church at Frankfurt, who was with the said Herzelles when he died, have sufficient knowledge [of these things]. Their proof is beyond dispute; it only has to be duly sought from them.

15. To this abomination he did not blush to add that on the last day we will not be resurrected in the same body.

16. The perversity of Helmont is not limited to Catholics but he tempts Lutherans also with the already mentioned allegorical interpretation of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ along with other impious abominations. If it will be necessary, a renowned man worthy of truth, but not Catholic, will testify concerning this matter.

17. Further, Helmont himself was able to remove several parish priests or curates from the principality of Sulzbach with great adroitness and to substitute in their place Quakers, cloaked under the name of Lutherans, summoned from Holland to inhabit the house which had previously belonged to the Jesuits. And these now deceptively profess themselves to be devoted to the Lutheran confession. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy and will be proven that those cited below will testify in addition from daily experience that after the confession of these, no absolution is given to the penitents, which is against the practice of the Lutheran religion. Consequently, this is some new or third religion, which, according to the concordat agreed to in the Empire and principality by the most serene princes of Neuburg and Sulzbach, should not be tolerated.

18. Public rumors and the infuriated people of Sulzbach, who with these and other aforementioned opinions say with the greatest sorrow that changes and new teachings were introduced by the authority of Helmont, will testify that having been provoked by a very just frenzy, they attacked him with stones to the point of bloody wounds. There is no doubt that the people would have overcome this man had he not decided to flee secretly.

19. [It will be testified] that, according to the custom of Anabaptists he applies himself to all sorts of labor. Now he sweats in weaving, now in taking up the hammer at the anvil of the smiths, then in the awls of shoemakers, and around the cooking pots in the market place. And he has been appointed to sing from the Hebrew Scriptures at any place whatsoever and at whatever labor first thing in the morning. So openly known is this that he himself will not, perchance, deny it when interrogated vigorously.

20. It happened recently during the last year that while in the woods, working as a carpenter, he was engaged in chopping down trees for fire wood (really!), and being too little wary of certain of these heavy trees, a branch, having been cut from below (which by a certain solemn cry raised to

the heavens he had set apart for use in weaving) fell down with violence on his right shoulder, so that, falling supine on the ground and having been gravely wounded, he was only with difficulty able to protect himself from the full weight of this. He did not wish to be cured from this injury in any other way than by applying to himself pieces of the aforesaid cut tree. Rising from the ground with a faltering step on account of his debility, he embraced the fallen tree and thus he reconciled himself to the tree, forgiven for its offense. He stoutly maintained this opinion, just as clearly as atheism, so that he took this as a sure remedy for wounds of any kind.

21. Furthermore, a thing that is well-authenticated, while in Bavaria, he attained a public reputation for heresy, so that if he had not been apprehended by the Duke of Neuburg, his Highness, the Elector of Bavaria, equally inflamed by concern for the sacred religion as his celebrated equal [the Duke of Neuburg], would have acted before the Duke of Neuburg and would have incarcerated him.

22. The most reverent Prince and Bishop Constantien, when he had learned of the arrest [of Helmont] by the Duke of Neuburg, wrote in letters sent to the Lord of Sirgenstein (of blessed memory), who was taking the place of the Duke of Neuburg, that his Highness, the Duke, had acted well and laudably by apprehending this man, but that he had acted even better by imprisoning him. . . .

23. Why should a scandalous heresiarch and vagabond of this sort, who under the covering of the Catholic religion deceives all believers with his piety, who is very much suspected of new opinions, according to the true reports of the Chapters of Ratisbone. . . who, with an indiscriminate familiarity with all sorts of heretics (who dedicate their books to him), sows discord among every one near him, who scandalizes most people, . . . who speaks badly of the Catholic faith and of the dogmas and sacred rituals of the Roman Church, who thinks, causes, or threatens a thousand other evils, be permitted to wander from place to place in order to fling out into the public his wanton fantasies or be allowed his previous liberty, especially since this fortunate situation has arisen. Certainly nothing else would happen [if he were freed] than that a new wound would be brought upon the injured Church in Germany.

Truly, the Office of the Holy Roman Inquisition would do a great favor to God and something very profitable to the saving of souls if it imprisoned Helmont (so often mentioned) so that he is not able, by wandering in these parts, to cause more trouble. Especially since it is more than sufficiently known how great an error there formerly was in this matter, which is now experienced. How grievous, O Germany, that Luther was so poorly watched.

. . .

DOCUMENT 5:

Examination of the Witness, Catholic Chancellor from Neuburg, Baron Franz von Gise (September, 12, 1662)[7]

. . . He answered, I have heard that the said Franciscus professed the Catholic faith and this about ten years ago, when I myself stayed with him for some months at Dusseldorf for the sake of business, which concerned for the greatest part his grace, the Prince of Sulzbach, with whom Helmont had great esteem and authority. I understood that he himself [Helmont] had confessed and had engaged in the other Catholic sacraments. Nevertheless, there were doubts even then about his sincerity and whether he had assented to this religion with a sincere heart. His grace, the Prince, told me that in the presence of those who had called the faith of Helmont in doubt, he had asked him [Helmont]: See here, Helmont, there are doubts about your religion; it is up to you to explain yourself. As I said, the matter at issue at Dusseldorf concerned the Prince of Sulzbach, whose greatest difficulty turned on the point of reintroducing the Catholic religion into the territory of Sulzbach, from which it had been routed not so long ago to the grave damage of the Catholic religion. In this matter, it is my opinion that if Helmont had wished to concern himself about bettering the position of Catholics, they would have perhaps been able to obtain much better conditions because of the esteem by means of which he prevailed with the Prince. It happened once, when the said Prince was going to Cologne from Dusseldorf, that Helmont and I joined him as companions. On that journey, as often happens, we talked about different topics, and when we approached the city, mention was made of the splendor of the Churches in Cologne. Helmont contended that sumptuous churches of this sort were not pleasing to the supreme deity. I put before him the temple at Jerusalem, the costly churches built by Constantine the Great at Rome and elsewhere, and the continuing respect for antiquity. When I noticed that he still maintained his opinion, I asked him, how should churches be built? He answered, in the manner of the Capuchins, with an appearance of humility (as far as I can remember). I remember also that on several occasions I disputed with the said Helmont on the matter of the religion of the Prince, who was at that time a Lutheran. What, indeed, these points of religion were, I cannot now remember. I add, to throw further light on this subject, that I often argued with the Prince about religion and whenever Helmont was present, I found he disagreed with me. Nevertheless he so twisted his meaning that I could not find him openly denying any article of faith. This is all I am able to depose, except that it was a common rumor that he cherished many heretical notions, to the point that he was soaked with Judaism [ut Judaismo tinctus sit]. . . .

. . . The witness was asked whether, after the aforementioned occasion, he discussed anything about religion with the said Helmont either with others

[7] Archivio Segreto Vatican, Archivio della Nunziatura die Colonia 81.

present or alone. He answered, in the recent assemblies at Frankfurt in 1657, if I am not mistaken, or in 1658, and in the Imperial meetings in Ratisbon either in 1654 or 1653, I talked with Helmont, not about religious disputes but about other matters. And so I believe I did not discuss religion with the said Helmont, so far as I recall, within the stated terms of the present trial.

. . . He was asked whether the rumor concerning which he gave a deposition against the said Helmont originated from a few or many years back and whether the rumor was as public and as infamous to everyone in this land, namely Sulzbach and Neuburg, as in upper Germany. He answered, concerning the origin or beginning of this rumor, I would not dare state anything for certain. Ten years before, or about the time of the treaty, I came to the notice of this Helmont on the aforesaid occasion of the treaty being concluded between the Princes of Sulzbach and Neuburg. For the rest, I consider it certain that this rumor has been public knowledge for many years. And that it is even known among Catholics in the territories of Dusseldorf, Neuburg, Maguntiae, Sulzbach, Frankfurt, Monachii, and the other territories of upper Germany. . . .

DOCUMENT 6:

Petro Pierucci to Phillip Wilhelm (Rome, March 10, 1663)[8]

After the meeting of the Cardinals of the Holy Office, Pierucci received the report from Cardinal Pallivicini.

. . . Your Highness should use some piety, moderation, and prudence in considering that Helmont was arrested without any proof at your first warning and instance and made to come to Rome, imprisoned with suffering and deprived of his freedom and that he was held prisoner a long time, waiting and asking for proof and the deposition of witnesses, on the basis of which the necessary orders [for his arrest] were given from the beginning. But, since no proof has arrived, and because the people called upon did not give depositions or because, scattered in various places far away, they could not be had, the Sacred Congregation could not reasonably keep him imprisoned any longer, nor proceed against him. Consider also the Prince of Sulzbach, who is so infuriated about it [this matter], that, if he should see the imprisonment continued without any basis of proof, he would believe that his Holiness and the Sacred Congregation must have political motives to throw themselves upon an injured party. . . .

[8] BHStA Munchen, Kasten Blau 72/5.

II. TRANSCRIPTIONS OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS:

DOCUMENT 1

Instruction fur Nuntius Marco Galli (Rom, 19. November 1661)

S'e appreso da questi miei Eminentissimi Supremi et Universali Inquisitori per negotio di molta importanza l'ardire havuto da Francesco van Helmont di tentare la conversione dalla fede catholica del Conte Palatino di Sulzbach, nuovamente ad essa convertito, et hanno sommamente lodato il zelo e la pietà del Signor Duca di Neoburgo di sentirsi contro il detto Francesco Mercurio anco con farlo carcerare, mentr'egli ritorna da Amsterdam. Ma perché la qualita della persona, che è medico celebre, e la libertà de' paesi ove egli dimora potrebbero opporsi a sì giusta risolutione, particolarmente se si venisse in cognitione ch'ella vi havesse le mani coll'impegnare se stessa e questa Santa Sede, di cui ella è ministro, in un affare che corre rischio di non sortire il fine che si desidera, hanno l'Eccelenze Loro stimato che io suggerisca a V.S. l'infrascritte considerationi:

1. Che la cattura di Francesco Mercurio si faccia per ordine del Signor Duca e da' suoi ministri, i quali potranno publicare essersi fatta per materie di stato o per altra tale caggione politica, senza che si penetri che V.S. ci habbia la mano o l'habbia persuasa.

2. Catturato ch'egli sarà, si faccia custodire in luogo sicuro sotto il medesimo titolo, afinché si possa ridurre, se sara possibile, nelle forze del Santo Offitio.

3. E giaché V.S. accenna esser costui sospetto non solamente d'heresia, ma di Giudaismo, sara necessario di fabricare sopra di ciò giuridico processo et esaminare testimonii che si dovranno procurare, s'egl'è possibile, che siano persone d'intiera fede e che non habbino qualche relatione di familiarita, amicitia o altro con esso, sì che si possi V.S. probabilmente assicurare che siano per servare il segreto, ai quali oltre il giuramento del silentio si potrà far precetto sotto pena di scommunica di lata sentenza riservandone l'assolutione a Nostro Signore et a questa Sacra Congregatione di non revelare cosa alcuna, né contenuta nei loro esami, né appartenente alla causa.

4. Havrassi però d'avertire nella deputatione del giudice che havrà da esaminare i testimonii, perché, deputandosi dal Signor Duca, non saranno le pruove che si ritrassero dall'esame de' testimonii fatti avanti di lui d'alcum valore per l'incapacità dei giudici laici di poter conoscere et ingerirsi nelle cause spirituali, quali sono quelle d'heresia e dell'apostasia dalla fede; onde, essendo necessario ch'egli si deputi o da V.S. o. dall'ordinario ecclesiastico, fa di mestieri di far tal deputatione segretissimamente e, quando si faccia da V.S., farla con un solo chirografo scritto e segnato da lei medesima senz'intervento d'altra persona, che per ciò fare se le da da Nostro Signore ogn'auttorita necessaria.

5. Si stima che su questo principio s'habbiano da esaminare quei testimonii che solamente sono informati o intorno all'heresie professate dal detto Francesco Mercurio o sopra gli atti di Giudaismo pratticati da lui e,

mentre siano persone diverse, pigliare le loro depositioni separatamente.

6. Prima d'esaminare testimonii sopra l'attentata sovversione dalla fede catholica del Conte Palatino dovrà V.S. dar parte alla Sacra Congregatione di quello si sarà provato sopra gli altri due punti d'heresia e di Giudaismo per operare poi secondo gli ordini della medesima.

7. Ma perché non mancheranno persone anco d'auttorità di procurare che Francesco Mercurio sia liberato dalle carceri e, stegli per aventura è Olandese, si potrebbero commovere quei Stati e minacciare al Signor Duca o pure con una ingiusta diversione maltrattare i catholici che vivono in Olanda, cio si pone in consideratione a V.S., afinche, se vi fossero tali pericoli, sarebbe forse meglio che né il Signor Duca ne ella s'impegnino in un affare tanto pericoloso, ma più espediente che Sua Altezza cercasse con maniere più piacevoli di sottrarre alla conversione di costui il Conte Palatino et in sua vece sostituire qualche dotto e pio catholico che possa confermarlo nella vera fede che egli ha abbracciata e levarli quell'ombre e quei scrupoli, co' quali cotesto scelerato gli ha imgombrata la mente.

8. In ogni caso, quando si risolvesse il Signor Duca di venire a cotesta cattura e dal processo, che si fabricherà, risultassero inditii gravi contra detto Francesco Mercurio d'heresia e d'apostasia dalla fede, sarà necessario che la persona di costui si riduca in tempo et coniuntura opportuna in parti ove il Sant'Offitio possa esercitare liberamente la sua giurisdittione, quando costi dall'ordinario non potesse essere castigato.

9. Di tutto ciò che seguirà et V.S. andarà facendo in questo negotio ella si contentarà di darne parte alla Sacra Congregatione del Santo Offitio.

DOCUMENT 2

Informatio de Helmontio (Mai/Juni 1662)

Franciscus Mercurius Helmontius, medicus et alchimista, ex variis religionibus (cum sit censor omnium et irrisor) videtur secundum lumen suum internum quintam aliquam essentiam novae fidei aliquare, homo vagabundus, vanorum principum in aulas sectator, inter illos simulat legationes et fingit, catholicum se dixit, confiteri etiam visus et communicare, quia si aliam religionem palam profiteretur, multorum principum aulas subire non posset, et simul catholicam ecclesiam errorum accusat, et ita gratus est et acceptus acatholicis, et chamaeleon varios religionis colores, quando vult, induit. Inter Hebraeos ita vivit, ut publica aliquando fama fuerit, quod ad eorum sacra circumcisus transiisset. Amicus etiam Anabaptistarum et Quackeriorum, quorum si non sequatur opiniones, illos tamen ob lanificium aliasque consuetas artes non laudat tantum, sed, familiariter, cum possit, illis convixit, in aulas principum seu illis subiectos civitates et oppida introducere conatur ex Hollandia, ubi omnium haereticorum semina impune pullulant, imo adea fuit temerarius et impudentissime audax, ut quendam Imperii Romani principem induxerit, ut incognitus secum in Hollandam descenderet videretque coram qua ratione Quackerii et Hebraei et Anabaptistae illic sua sacra ex interiore suo lumine peragerent et amentias exercerent.

Ex quo coloniam Hebraeorum, Anabaptistarum forte et Quackeriorum (sub nomine Hollandorum seu Batavorum Lutheranorum opificum) ex Hollandia Sulzbacum advexit, qui diversis opificiis imbuti etiam ad habendas conciones perinde omnes instituti, interioris sui luminis instinctu, quandocumque opus dicunt, quod interius audiunt et ad quod moventur, qui aliis nullis libris utuntur quam Thaulero per Lutherum castigato atque, ut aiunt, emendatius edito; deinde Matthia quodam Weyero, Jacobo Bohmen et bibliis Lutheri, quae etiam authore Helmontio super mensam principis catholici alta voce leguntur. Hi libri clanculum catholicis suggeruntur, et non licet bibliopago sub gravissimis poenis ulli hominum ullum folium horum librorum et aliorum ex Hollandia a fece ista hominum asportatorum inspiciendum exhibere, nisi ante Helmontius iubeat. Hi opifices non catholici ad 20 usque familias invitati Sultzbachum erectis per diversos lares officinis etiam in ipsa aula versari coeperunt, ut scilicet inducatur princeps, ut facile et inter illos collaborare possit, et averti a curis, quae ad publicam administrationem spectant et subditorum bonum regimen, et ut horum artificum artes condiscant filii civium, scholae deseruntur et iuventutis educatio negligi coepta est. ut tanto facilius cogantur cives suos filios applicare novis istis artibus addiscendis venenoque novae religionis imbuantur, et ut maneat species religionis antiquae, cum Biblia pleraque hebraica lingua scripta sint primum, hi artifices discunt et docent primo mane una altera e hora linguam Hebraicam, qua et ipse princeps et filiae imbuuntur; deinde textile suum quisque ad opus vel quodcunque aliud artificium suum accedit; denique ad ollas culinarias (pudenda res) et ad cocturas suas accedunt et audent Helmontio authore ipsum principem invitare, ut collaboret et manducet (ait ille doctor) laborum manuum suarum et secundem Apostolum: qui non laborat, non manducet; discurrunt subinde per varias officinas horum diversorum opificum, etiam non fabri inter fabros apprehensis malleis ad incudem laborant, vel cum sutore fila trahunt, ut ita, sicut Anabaptistae loquuntur, charitatem sibi mutuo et officium praestant.

Interdum in sylvas subito procurrunt, ut lumen interius videant et moveantur ab illo ad loquendum; dicunt denique se inter suos labores videre visiones angelorum, illustrationes admirabiles, ideo docent etiam principes debere omittere negotiorum tractationes, non debere his illuminationibus animum intentum ulla vel iustitae vel causarum aliarum consideratio impediri.

Notandum.

Helmontius citius capietur in sermone, ut dicat quis sit. Si interrogatur de fide quam habet, ille dicit statim catholicam; hanc explicare non poterit sine errore, alias sectas omnes dicit se odisse, et non mentietur, quia ex singulis quod placet, credit, etsi non fateatur.

Errores et doctrina Helmontii.

1. Dicere solet nullum esse doctorem seu magistrum praeter Christum; addit nullum esse doctum vel sanctum.

2. Persuasit alicui, ut filias suas ex Belgio revocaret, ubi catholice sancteque educabantur voluitque illas discere sine doctore et visiones domi apud parentem videre ex interiore lumine.

3. Reprehendit quendam magnatem, quod conversus a Lutheranismo publicam professionem catholicae fidei fecisset, hanc non fuisse necessariam; eundem avertit a bono proposito, ne kalendarium Gregorianum novum subditis promulgaretur.

4. Interdum auditus est dicere, quemlibet in sua fide salvari posse secundum singulare ipsius lumen et lumen conscientiae.

5. Principem quendam conversum ad catholicam fidem secreto duxit in Transylvaniam, Moraviam, Bohemiam et Hollandiam promisitque ibi illum vere fideles et christianos inventurum. Cum illo principe familiarior putatur suo consilio effecisse, ut a se ablegaret Jesuitas, secundo Capucinos, tertio adgregaret sibi Judaeos et artifices Batavos, qui iam nunc habitant in domo, in qua ante Jesuitae habitarunt.

6. Eidem principi persuadere voluit non licere ulli uti sex equis in rheda et vivere more consueto aliorum principum, sed vitam illi agendam in laboribus, opificiis, consuetudine civium.

7. Nulli hominum credendum ait, etsi iuramentum interponat, idcirco a nemine exigendum iuramentum, quod se rvare id non possit.

8. Putat non punienda scelera et effecit, ut quidam magistratus tempore iam aliquo dissimulet, carnis etiam peccata gravissima, incestus et adulteria manserint impunita, et mater quaedam, quae filium occiderat, libera dimissa sit sine poena, imo nulli ait licere alium ad mortis poenam condemnare.

9. Docet Biblia non esse recte versa, ideo opus esse, omnino discere linguam Hebraicam ad verum illorum sensum et intellectum; libros insuper plerosque Biblia esse comburendos, eo quod doctrina ex libris hausta damnabilis sit, praeter ea quae interiore lumine manifestantur et discuntur.

10. Contumeliose loqui solet de catholica religione et ecclesia catholica, illius hierarchia, clero, caeremoniis, et sacras vestes pretiosiores in templis usitatas superbiae et avaritiae ascribit, fundationes aliquas reprehendit.

11. Principibus non exhibet honorem, illi principi, cui familiarior est et quem per varias provincias circumductum opinionibus novis turbavit, quando literas scribit, nullum titulum praeponit, sed absolute incipit "accepi tuas literas" nec nomen subscribit.

Summa.

Quidquid Helmontio ex lumine interiore manifestatur, mera tenebrosissimae mentis ludibria sunt usque ad impura suilia, quae Helmontius quasi sicarius negotiator persuadere conatus est principi, ut in arce plurima aedificare mandaret, ubi greges porcorum alerentur, ut vel sic principis aula esset similis villae vel domui rusticanae.

Propter haec et similia ex illis enata scandala et improperia impingenda principum magnorum nominibus, praeter gravissimum animae et fidei detrimentum, varii principes indicarunt, Helmontium ex communi turba hominum et aularum contubernio eliminandum in vincula trahendum ad frugem meliorem et emendationem.

DOCUMENT 3:

Discours Serenissimi Sultzebacensis mit Herrn J[ohann] A[braham] P[oemer] uber die von ihme deroselben wegen Serenissimi Neoburgensis mit ihme gehabter discours und postulaten beschehene eroffnung.

Sie bedawerten, daß Ihre Durchlaucht zu Neuburg Seiner Durchlaucht so wenig Lieb und Affection zutrügen, da doch sie sich allen Respects und Gedult befließen und Ihrer Furstlichen Durchlaucht freundvetterlich zu dienen getrachtet. . . .

Thäten bekennen, daß ihro hierinfals nur daß schmertzligste, daß der Herr von Hellmont umb ihretwillen also gefangen und ungehört, noch incondemnirt, alß wenigstens überwiesen, aus Teutschland zur Inquisition geführet werden sollen, und deshalben, ihr Gewißen zu beruhigen, verlangeten sie deßen Restitution; solte es iedoch dem Herrn, der da recht richtet und des Herrn von Hellmonts Unschuldt werde wißen zu rächen, und dem Heyligen Römischen Reich, welches hierin sein Interesse würde wißen zu consideriren. Sie hetten nicht die Kräffte, wieder einen so mächtigen Fürsten und mit königlichen, auch chürfurstlichen Potentaten veralliirten Vettern zu stehen, wehren auch lieber Friedens begierig als Unruh; so viel aber ihrer Ehr und famam betreffe, wichen sie in keinem. . . . Waß Seine Fürstliche Durchlaucht von Herrn von Hellmont gehört und gesehen, wehre untadelich, und obschon seine mores nicht ieglichem angestanden, hetten sie darauß wenig Argernüs gefunden als ChurMaintz und ChurPfaltz. Kein heresiarcha seye er noch Verföhrer; wer ihn dafür halte, möge er ihn überzeugen; dieseshalber wehre das Reich klug und gerecht, auch groß genug gewesen. Hetten Ihre Durchlaucht ein anders von ihm versparet, würden sie ihme freundlich gewarnet und nie darin consentiret haben, derohalben sie auch alß Herr von Hellmont selbsten bezeugen würdte, keinen Scrupul in religione gehabt, sondern aller Orthen vor allerhand Persohnen sich gut catholisch profitirt, auch öfters dabey gewesen, daß Herr von Hellmont dergleichen gethan; wolte man es nicht glauben, wehren sie nicht Gott, die Menschen darzu zu bewegen, hette es so gar unser Heyland nicht vermöcht, alß die Phariseer Ihm der Teuffel Obristen und Beelzebub mit Gewalt wißen wollen; dahero sie auch keine Quäkers noch Schwermers zu sich beruffen noch in Willens gehabt; werde es kein Mensch mit Warheit sagen, so wenig alß daß sie derhalben nach Holland gereyset wehren.

DOCUMENT 4:
Anklageschrift der Inquisition (Rom, 5. Juli 1662)

Comparet personaliter in Congregatione Generali Sanctae Romanae et Universalis Inquisitionis habita in conventu Beatae Mariae supra Minervam coram Eminentissimis et Reverendissimis Dominis Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalibus, in tota republica christiana adversus haereticam pravitatem Generalibus Inquisitoribus a Sancta Sede Apostolica specialiter deputatis, Reverendus Dominus Petrus Serista, Procurator Fiscalis eiusdem Sanctae Romanae Inquisitionis, et denuntiando exponit ad eius notitiam devenisse, non quidem a malevolis vel suspectis, sed potius a fide dignis personis, Franciscum Mercurium van Elmont, Bruxelles natum et in fide catholica educatum, tenuisse et respective docuisse infrascriptas propositiones, scilicet:

1. Fertur Franciscum Mercurium Helmont patre medico Bruxellensi natum ab ephebis in servitio Hispani comitis de Claravalle oppinionibus heterodoxis addictum adolevisse.

2. Duodecim anni sunt et quod excurrit, ex quo in hasce Superioris Germaniae partes devenit. Cursitando et oberrando variorum principum aulas, singularia quaedam chymica secreta ac peregrinae fidei dogmata spargendo, ipsa Apostolorum limina et Sanctorum Romanae Ecclesiae status ac totam Italiam oberravit et sub fucato peregrinationis colore iustas in Imperio et alibi de se seu fidei suae perversae conceptas opiniones in assumpto habitu ordinis Sancti Francisci Eremitico elusit, hoc ipso demonstrando se hominem vagabundum nullius frugi et nullo certo vitae generi addictum erronem.

3. Dum ita vagatus et modo apud Catholicos, Lutheranos, Calvinistas, modo apud Quackerios, Ababaptistas aut Haebreos degens omniumque fidei suas fides accommodat, mirum non est, si piis ac vere cordatis principibus se novae ac plane incogninitae cuipiam religioni aut (quod magis verendum) atheismo addictum esse suspectum reddiderit.

4. Inter alios sese applicuit cuidam Romano Imperii principi (ipsi Helmontio optime noto), quem eo simulata sua probitate ac falsis dogmatibus pellexit, ut una secum in partibus hisce veros christianos non inveniri crederet, sed alibi quaerendos existimaret, ac proinde dictum principem serenissima coniuge, serenissimis liberis ac statibus insciis hic vagabundus erro ad quaerendos Roseae Crucis fratres, damnatae memoriae homines, ut eos nominarat, simileque farinae socios per Transilvaniam, Ungariam, Bohemiam, Moraviam et similia acatholicae religioni addicta loca incognitum abduxerit.

5. Redux dein socium ac fratrem, non hospitem principis se vendicans eo discriminis res aut status eiusdem adduxit falso doctrinae suae errore, ut iuxta sibi communem opinionem fornicationes, incoestus, adulteria (argument. cap. 38 Genesios) imo nulla omnino delicta punienda palam assereret eamque opinionem intrepidus sic defendit, mox subsecutum ut sit,

ut doctrina haec ex ordine superiorum publica velut novum decretum aut statutum consuetis iudicii seu cancellariae foribus affigeretur ac immediate post mulier quaedam proprii infanticidii rea publice et aperte convicta libera et impunita dimissa sit.

6. Praeterea universo praefati principis populo indubitate persuadere conatus est, oratores seu verbi divini praecones, cuiuscunque etiam religionis, qui libris et non pura gratia infusa ad concionandum utuntur, in nulla omnino estimatione habendos esse.

7. Insuper nec veritas est profiteri sacrarum divinarumque litterarum authores seu interpretes scriptos solo authore quodam, quem ipse Helmontius componeret, qui normam bene vivendi, satis superque traderet ac sacris litteris retentis ad unum omnes delendos et comburendos esse.

8. Ulterius sacras litteras versas huiusque in verum ac genuinum sensum linguae originariae translatas non esse, sed se ex Haebraica lingua, sibi apprime nota, rite traducturum affirmavit.

9. Similiter confessionem ac sacram eucharistiae sumptionem superfluam ac supervacaneam esse, eo quod homo denuo ad priora peccata recidivus labatur et sic divina maiestas magis magisque irritetur, in publica mensa Comitis Ambergensis professus est.

10. Baptismum nostrum ex aqua materiali necessarium non esse, sed sufficere homini, si bonis operibus ac intrinseco quodam fervore bene operandi characterem christiani hominis sibi imprimat, cum pertinacia tuetur Helmont.

11. Unumquemque in fide sua, qualicumque etiam, posse salvari pro indubitato tenet idem Helmont.

12. Corpora sanctorum naturali, non miraculosa virtute a corruptione praeservari, doctrina est Helmontii, quam opinionem in praesentia Serenissimi Neoburgici audientibus Reverendo Patre Otterstet ac Domino Doctore Weibel defendit.

13. Divinae Maiestati splendida templa, amplas ornatasque basilicas non, sed semplices Capucinorum capellas ad populi propitionem exstruendas esse, in contradictorio defendisse Helmontium testabitur ad hunc articulum in specie nominatus.

14. Loqueretur, si viveret, Eminentissimi Domini Electoris Maguntini quondam consiliarius et ablegatus in conventu Francofurtensi , Nobilis Dominu Philippus Otto ab Herzelles, nuper defunctus, de pluribus nefariis Helmontii dogmatibus, quae ipse eidem instillare plus semel conatus est. scilicet nihilominus esse credendum de iis, quae Sancta Catholica Ecclesia docet de conceptione, nativitate, passione, resurrectione Christi Servatoris Nostri. Allegorice haec omnia intelligenda, non secundum litteram, Christum in veris Christianis, id est Helmontianis, quotidie concipi, nasci, pati, mori, resurgere; nec aliter haec intelligi debere de virgine sacratissima, quae ab Helmontio plus semel constanter audivisse variis narravit antedictus Herzelles, ita ut ipse Elector Maguntinus et Dominus Breuing, Sanctissimae Theologiae Doctor et parochus ac scholasticus ecclesiae Francofurtensis, qui

dicto Herzelles in extremis adfuit, cognitionem habeant sufficientem, cuius etiam probatio in facili est. modo ab eisdem rite petatur.

15. Cui nefando ausit et hoc annectere non erubuit, nos in extremo die in eadem carne non resurrecturos.

16. Helmontii perversitas sese apud catholicos non continuit, sed Lutheranos quoque de iam dicto sensu allegorico incarnationis, resurrectionis Christi tentavit et aliis pluribus nefandis tentavit. Testabitur id, si opus erit, vir fide dignus ad hunc articulum nominatus, sed acatholicus.

17. Praeterea quamquam ipse Helmontius nonnullos parochos, plebanos aut curatos principatus Sultzbacensis mira dexteritate amovere et in locum eorum Quackerios Lutheranorum nomine palliatos ex Bathavia accersitos ac domum, quam antea Patres Societatis Jesu habuerunt, inhabitantes surrogare noverit et iidem nunc in Sultzbacensi se invariatae Augustanae Confessioni addictos speciose profiteantur. Notum tamen est et testabuntur praeter experientiam quotidianam infra citati, quod post confessionem eorum poenitentibus contra Augustanae Religionis norma nulla detur absolutio et in consequenti religio quaedam nova ac tertia, quae iuxta concordata Serenissimi Neoburgici et Serenissimi Sulzbacensis erecta in Imperio aut principatu ibidem non tolleranda.

18. Testabitur praeter ipsum Elmontium et ipsa fama publica infrascriptos ipsa adirata plebs Sulzbacensis, quae cum hasce et alias antedictas status, mutationes et nova dogmata authore Helmontio introducta summa cum luctu videret qualiter iustissimo furore percita eum lapidibus ad ipsa sanguinolenta usque vulnera adorta fuerit, obrutura tunc procul dubio hominem, ni subdola ac praecipiti fuga sibi consuluisset.

19. Quod Anabaptistarum more ad omne genus laboris sese applicet et iam in arte textoria, iam ad incudem fabrorum apprehenso malleo, mox in sutorum subulis et ad forum circa ollas culinarias desudet et quovis mane primum quemque laborem a cantu et litteris Hebraicis ordinatur, ita palam est. ut nec ipse etiam interrogatus forte negabit.

20. Ex quo nuper anno proximo lapso accidit, ut dum in sylva fabrorum more in succedendis (sic!) arboribus versaretur ac parum cautus cuiusdam praeponderantis arboris succisus ramus (quem solemni quodam in coelum elato clamore in artis textoriae usum hoc ipso dedicarat) in humerum eius dextrum ita ruerat ut supinus in terram cadens graviter laesus vix a totali eius oppressione sese servasset, quo malo aliter mederi noluit, quam praesegmina iam dictae et caesae arboris sibi applicando et a terra surgens, nutante adhuc prae debilitate gressu in amplexus iacentis arboris eundo, ac ita sese remissae arbori offensae reconciliaret, quam opinionem ut Atheismo plenam ita mordicus tuetur, ut cuiusvis obvio laeso pro indubitato remedio assignet.

21. Quid, quod in comperto est. cum in Bavaria publica haeresiarchae fama laboraret, ut si a Serenissimo Duce Neoburgico apprehensus non fuisset, Serenissimus Elector Bavariae pari inclitae ac sanctae religionis zelo accensus Serenissimum Ducem Neoburgicum praevenisset eumque incarcerasset.

22. Quam Serenissimi Neoburgici apprehensionem Reverendissimus Princeps Episcopus Constantiensis cum intellexisset in litteris ad locum tenentem Ducatus Neoburgici Dominum de Sirgenstein piae memoriae datis, scripsit bene ac laudabiliter fecisse Serenissimum Ducem Neoburgicum hunc hominem apprehendendo, melius autem faceret eum custodiendo. . . .

23. Quare eiusce modi scandalosum haeresiarcham hominem vagabundum sub velo religionis catholicae omnibus pie credulis insidiantem, novorum dogmatum suspectissimum iuxta verum extractum capituli Ratisbonensis. . . discordias inter proximos serentem promiscua cum omnis generis haereticis familiaritate, qui et libros ipsi dedicarunt, . . . plurimos scandalizantem, pessime de fide catholica, de dogmatibus ac ritibus sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae loquentem, sentientem et mille alia mala causantem vel minantem pro proiecta sua libidine iterum divagare permittere aut priorem libertatem concedere, praecipue cum nunc optima tulerit occasio, certe nil aliud foret quam afflictae in Germania ecclesiae novum vulnus adferre.

Verum Sactum Romanum Inquisitionis Officium faciet rem Deo gratissimam et animarum saluti admodum proficuam, si saepe nominatum Helmontium ita contineat, ne in partibus hisce oberrando plura mala causare possit; praesertim cum satis superque notum sit, quantum erratum fuerit in hoc olim et experitur, proh dolor!, Germania, quod male custoditus fuerit Lutherus. . . .

DOCUMENT 5:

Zeugenbefragung des Kanzlers Franz Gise (12 September 1662)

. . . Respondit, quoad religionem audivi, quod dictus Franciscus profiteatur fidem catholicam idque ante decennium circiter, cum ego ipse cum ipso per aliquot menses haererem Dusseldorpii negotiorum causa, quae maximarn partem concernebant Serenissimum Principem Sultzbacensem, apud quem praedictus Helmontius grati a et aucto ritate pollebat. Intellexi ipsum fuisse confessum et cetera sacra catholica obiisse. Dubitabatur tamen etiam tum de sinceritate ipsius et cui religioni syncere ex corde esset addictus, prout ipse Serenissimus Princeps mihi narravit se coram illis, qui Helmontii fidem in dubium vocassent, illum interrrogasse: "Ecce, Helmonti, dubitatur hic de tua religione: tuum est iam te explicare." Agebatur tunc, ut dixi, causa Principis Sultzbacensis Dusseldorpii, cuius maxima difficultas versabatur in puncto religionis catholicae reintroducendae in statum Sultzbacensem, ex quo non ita pridem gravi catholicae religionis detrimento erat profligata. In quo negotio, uti opinor, si Helmontius sua qua praevalebat apud Principem gratia in emolumentum catholicorum impendere voluisset, meliores conditiones obtinere forte potuissent. Contigit semel, cum dictus Princeps Sultzbacensis Dusseldorpio Coloniam proficiscens meque et Helmontium comites sibi adiungere. In isto itinere, uti fieri solet, varii sunt commutati sermones, cumque appropinquaremus huic civitati, facta est mentio splendoris templorum Coloniensium. Helmontius contendebat supremo numini non placere sumptuosas huiusmodi basilicas; ego opponebam ipsi templum

Hierosolimitanum et pretiosa templa a Constantino Magno Romae et alibi exstructa et continuam observantiam antiquitatis. Cumque animadverterem Helmontium nihilominus in sua sententia persistere, quaerebam ex eo, quomodo ergo templa es sent aedificanda. Respondit ad modum Capucinorum, praetendens (quantum adhuc recordor) humilitatem. Memini etiam me aliquoties in materia religionis occasione Principis Sultzbacensis tunc temporis adhuc Lutherani in materia fidei cum dicto Helmontio disputare. Quinam vero isti articuli religionis fuerint, iam mihi non succurrunt. Addo pro maiori luce et explicatione, me saepissime cum ipso Principe de religione contendisse et quandoque Helmontio praesente quem quoties inveni mihi contrarium, ita tamen suos sensus contorquentem, ut manifeste illum negare aliquem articulum fidei non invenerim, et hoc est totum quod ego possum deponere, nisi quod communis vox et fama sit, illum plurimas opiniones haereticas fovere usque adeo ut Judaismo tinctus sit.

. . . Interrogatus an unquam post praedictum tempus ipse testis egerit cum praedicto Helmontio in causa religionis sive aliis et si solus vel cum aliis. Respondit: In nuperis comitiis Francfurtensibus anno 1657, ni fallor, vel 1658 et in Comitiis Imperialibus Ratisbonensibus anno 1654 vel 1653 egi cum Helmontio absque disputationibus religionis, sed de aliis negotiis, et sic credo me non egisse cum dicto Helmontio de religione, prout memini, in dictis vicibus praesenbs examinis.

Interrogatus, an fame de qua deposuit contra dictum Helmontium habuerit ortum a paucis sive a multis annis, et an sit fame publica et notoria omnibus tam in hac patria quam in Superiori Germania, scilicet Sultzbaci vel Neoburgi, respondit: De origine vel initio famae nihil ausim certo statuere: ante decennium enim seu circiter praedicta occasione, scilicet alicuius transactionis ineundae inter Principem Sultzbacensem et Neoburgicum, prout supradictum, perveni in notitiam istius Helmontii. De caetero ego habeo istam famam pro certa, publica et constante a multis annis; et eadem est etiam praestans Dusseldorpii, Neoburgi, Maguntiae, Herbipoli, Sultzbaci, Francofurti, Monachii et in aliis Superioris Germaniae civitatibus apud praecipuos catholicos, quibus cognitus est. . . .

DOCUMENT 6:

Pietro Pierucci an Philipp Wilhelm (Rom, 10. Marz 1663)

Nach der Sitzung der Kardinäle des Hl. Offiziums erhielt Pierucci von Kardinal Pallavicini die Mitteilung

. . . l'Altezza Vostra haverebbe usata della sue pietà, moderatione e prudenza in considerare che senza alcuna prove alli suoi primi avvisi et instanze s'era accettato l'Helmont et fatto venire a Roma carcerato con patimento e discapito dell'esser suo e che qui stera tenuto prigione lungo tempo, aspettando e sollecitando le prove e le depositioni delli testimonii, per le quali fin da principio si erano dati gl'ordini necessarii, ma che, non essendosi arrivata prove alcuna, o perché le persone nominate non deponevano, o perché, dispersi in varii luoghi, non si potevano havere, la

Sacra Congregatione non poteva con ragione tenerlo più carcerato né andar più avanti contro il medesimo in consideratione ancora del Signor Principe di Sulzbach che tanto vi si è riscaldato che, se vedesse allungarsi la carcere senza fondamento di prove potrebbe credere che Sua Santità et la Sacra Congregatione vi havesse fini politici e gettarsi a partiti dannosi. . . .

APPENDIX TWO

PHILIPP WILHELM OF NEUBURG'S CHARGES AGAINST VAN HELMONT AND CHRISTIAN AUGUST'S REPLY

I. ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Motives and Reasons why the illustrious Prince and Lord, Lord Philipp Wilhelm, Palatine Count of the Rhine, etc. wished to take Franciscus Mercurius, Baron of Helmont, prisoner in Kutzingen and from there to allow him to be taken to Rome finally communicated to Christian August, Palatine Count of the Rhine, by the express orders of the Prince.[1]

The Motives and Reasons of the highly esteemed and illustrious Count Palatine of Neuburg.

1. Herr van Hellmont publicly brought into doubt and challenged several articles and of the Catholic religion and ancient customs of the same Church.

2. Herr von Hellmont deterred the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach from introducing for the people the new calendar according to the Treaty of Köln, which was agreed between the two Princes in 1652.

3. Herr von Hellmont disapproved of the conversion of the Palatine Prince of Sulzbach to Catholicism.

4. The illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach, etc. went into the woods with Herr von Hellmont and heard in the very place the spirit of van Hellmont preach for a full hour.

5. Herr von Hellmont seduced his illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach, etc. into setting up a Hebrew school in his residence.

6. Because of that, Herr von Hellmont was publicly accused of Judaizing.

7. Through the persuasion and inducement of van Helmont, the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach has invited to Sulzbach strange (and because they were called Quakers) suspicious preachers, rapacious wolves in sheep's clothing.

8. Similarly, at the instigation of Herr van Hellmont, the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach has allowed several families and households suspected of being Quakers to be brought there [to Sulzbach] under the guise of being hand workers.

9. Herr Helmont is the founder of the Quakers.

The Answers of the highly esteemed and illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach

1. The illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach, etc. does not any longer remember that he heard such things from Herr von Hellmont's mouth after

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[1] A copy of this pamplet can be found in Sulzbach, Evangelischen Gemeindebibliothk. I would like to thank Manfred Finke for sending me a Xerox copy.

such a long time. The illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Neuburg is free to name the articles themselves and to specify the customs.

2. The illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach denies this and announces in this connection that, indeed, Herr von Hellmont himself desired such an introduction [of the new calendar], but because at that time, as his illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Neuburg also decided, several considerable obstacles existed which had to be first removed, and he did not think this had been done. However, the introduction happened in good time.

3. The Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach also denies this, saying that Herr von Hellmont, who, so to speak, planted the first seed of that conversion, and, even more, congratulated me on its account and, indeed, even with the same words as distinguished Jesuit, which were the following: "My son, come to the service of God and prepare your soul for temptation."

4. These are dreams and fairy tales which are neither worthy to be written nor believed and never can be proved.

5. This [charge] is contradicted by his illustrious Prince himself since for the last twenty years, from his youth onwards, and before he had heard the least thing about Herr Helmont, he had the desire to let himself be instructed in Hebrew and other languages.

6. The illustrious Prince has neither substantiated this charge from the words or works of Herr von Hellmont, nor can he believe it from the slightest conjecture, much less could he believe it or can believe it now.

7. This is also denied because these people, who were born in Germany and well instructed in theology at universities, were provided with sincere depositions from those authorities under whom they had lived for several years and where they had performed their spiritual duties. They were loved no less by the citizens of Sulzbach, Catholics as well as Lutherans, both for their confession of faith and conduct, and for this reason they were publicly and unanimously praised and commended in front of the illustrious Prince.

8. Similarly, this is also denied. A single weaver and his wife and children came here from Holland, but he was born in Germany and was completely above suspicion in matters of religion. He supported his family with his hand work, in which he was very expert.

9. This is also thoroughly denied since it would be a strange metamorphosis and alteration if this person who was so shortly before a Jew should now he the head of the Quakers.

Now may each person freely judge for himself whether such a person, a person who has received sincere and public testimonies from the highest spiritual authorities in Brussels and from other pious Churchmen on account of his blameless life and purity in the Catholic religion, should have been imprisoned on account of these fables and fairly tales and taken across the borders of the Empire and into Italy to the Inquisition. If the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Neuburg, etc. had other more important reasons and yet wished to keep them back, the illustrious Prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach does not

doubt that these, in as far as these will be communicated to him, will be denied just as easily.

II.TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENT:

Motiven und Ursachen/umb welcher willender Durchleuchtigste Fürst und Herr/ Herr Philipp Wilhelm/ Pfalzgraf bey Reyn/ u. Hern Franciscum Mercurium, Freyherrn von Hellmont/ zu Kützingen gefänglich annehmen/ und von dar nach Rohm führen lassen/ allemassen diselbe/ dem auch Durchleuchtigsten Fürsten und Herrn/ Herrn Christiano Augusto, Pfalzgrafen bey Rheyn/ u. Auf dero Fürstliche Durchleucht. bewegliches anhalten/ endlichen Schrifflich communicirt worden..

Motiven und Ursachen Höchstgedachter Fürstlicher Pfaltzgräf: Neuburg: Durchleucht:

1. Herr von Hellmont/ hätte etliche Articul der Catholischen Relgion/ und alte Gebräuche selbiger Kirchen/ offentlich über der Tafel/ in Gegenwart Seiner Fürstlichen Durchleuchtigkeit zu Pfalz=Sulzbach/ &. in Zweyfel gezogen und agefochten.
2. Herr von Hellmont/ hätte Seiner Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfalz=Sultzbach/ &. abgehalten/ daß sie den Neunen Calender/ bey dem Anno 1652. zwischen beeden Ihro Fürstl: Durchleuchtigkeit Durchl: zu Cöllen angerichteten Verträgen vertöster Massen nicht eingeführet.
3. Herr von Hellmont/ hätte improbirt, daß Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfalz=Sulzbach/ &. Zur Catholicschen Religion getretetn.
4. Ihro Furstl: durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sulbach/ &. were mit Herrn von Helllmont in die Wälder hinaußgegangen/ Und daselbsten dessen Geist hören predigen/ gantze Sunden lang.
5. Herr von Hellmont/ hätte Seiner Fürstl: Durchleuchtigkeit zu Pfaltz=Sulzbach/ &. dahin verleytet/ daß sie in dero Residentz ein Hebräishe Schuhl aufgerichtet.
6. Herr von Hellmont/ were deß Judaismi halben offentlich beshuldiget worden.
7. Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sultzbach/ &. hätten durch Beredund Verleytung deß Herrn von Hellmonts frembde/ und wegen der Quackerey/ verdächtige Prediger/ so under der Schafshaut reissende Wölffe/ nacher Sulzbach beruffen.
8. Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sultzbach/ &. Hätten gleichfals auß Antrieb deß Herrn von Hellmonts/ etliche Familiem und Hauß=haltung/ so der Quackerey halber verdächtig/ under einem Schein der Manufacturen anhero holen lassen.
9. Herr von Hellmont sey der Quackerey Author.

Anwort Höchstgedachter Fürstlicher Pfaltz=Sultzbachisher Durchleucht:

1. Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sultzbach/ &. Wissen sich/ nach so lang verflossenen Jahren/ dessen nicht mehr zu erinnern/ noch daß sie solches auß deß Herrn von Hellmonts Mund gehört hätten/ es wäre Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Neuburg/ &. frey gestanden/ selbige Articul und Gebrauch specifice zu denominiren.

2. Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sulzbach/ widersprechen es; Zeigen aber darbey an/ daß zwar Herr von Hellmont solche introduction selbsten desiderirt, aber weilen damals wie es Seiner Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Neuburg/ &. gleich gewolt tröstet haben/ noch etliche merckliche obstacula vorhanden gewesen/ so vorhero haben müssen auß dem Weg geraumet werden/ von ihme noch nie rahtsam were gehalten worden welche doch bald zu gequemer Zeit erfolget seye.

3. Ihro Fürstl: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sultzbach/ negiren auch dieses/ dabey sagende/ daß Ihro Herr von Hellmont/ welcher gleichsam den erstern Stein zu deroselben Conversion glegt/ vielmehr deßwegen gratuliert, und zwar eben mit dergleiche Worten/ also Ihro Fürstl: durchl: ein vornehmer Pater Societatis Jesui fast zu gleicher Zeit hierzu Glück gewünschet habe/ selbig Wort aber seynd nachfolgende gewesen: Fili mi, accedens ad servitutem Dei, praepara animam tuam ad tentationem.

4. Dieses seynd Träume und Mährlein/ welche nicht werth/ daß sie sollen geschrieben oder geglaube werden/seynd auch in Ewigkeit nie zu erweisen.

5. Wird von Seiner Fürstlichen Durchl: widersprochen/ sinetmal dieselbe bereits von 20. Jahren/ und ehe sie von dem Herrn Hellmont das geringste gehört/ sich in der Hebräischen/ und andern Spraachen [sic]/ zu dem sie von Jugend auf eine Lust getragen/ instituiren lassen.

6. Diese Beschuldigung haben Seiner Fürstl: Durchl: weder an deß Herrn von Hellmonts Worten noch Wercken/ auch durch die geringste Muthmasung nicht wahr vermercken/ vielweniger glauben können/ glaubens auch annoch nicht.

7. Wird gleichfals negirt, dann es Leuthe so in Deutschland gebohrnen/ auf Universitäten in der Theologia wol underrichtet/ von denjenigen Obrigkeiten/ under welcher sie etliche lange Jahr geleben/ und ihr geistlich Ampt verrichtet/ mit herzlichen Testimoniis begabet/ und nichtweniger auch von derhiesiger Sulzbachischen Bürgerschaffen so wol Catholischen als Evangelischen/ beydes ihrer Glaubens=Bekanntnus und Wandels wegen geliebt/ auch deßwegen vor Seiner Fürstl: Durchl: von ihnen offentlich/ und einmütiglich gelobet und gerühmet worden.

8. Ebenmässig wird auch dieses negirt, es ist nur ein Einziger Weber/ mit seinem Weib und Kindern/ auß Holland anhero komen/ welcher aber ein geborner Deutscher/ und in dero Religion gantz unverdächtig/ und sich mit seinem Handwerck/ dessen er wol erfahren/ nehren thut.

9. Dieses wird gleichfals durchauß negirt, dann es eine wunderliche metamorphosis und Veränderung seyn würde/ daß derjenige so kurtz vorher ein Jud gewesen/ jetzt gehling der Quacker Haupt worden seyn solle.

Nun mag ein jeder frey judiciren, wer da will/ ob eine solche Person/ so auch von der Hohen Geistlichen Obrigkeit zu Brüssel und andern Gottseeligen Religionsen/ mit erzlichen offentlichen Testimoniis, wegen seiner untadelhafften Lebens und purität/ in der Catholischen Religion condecorirt worden/ wegen dieser Gedicht und Mährlein habe gefangen/ und über die Gränze deß Reiches/ in Welschland zur Inquisition geführt werden sollen? Da aber etwa Ihro Fürst: Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Neuburg/ & andere mehr importirende Ursachen hätten noch wollen zurück behalten/ so wird/ ex parte, Seiner Durchl: zu Pfaltz=Sulzbach/ nicht gezweyfelt/ daß sie/ dafern sie ihro würden communicirt werden/ nicht oben so leichtlich solleten mit Bestand abgeleynet werden können.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Printed Works by or attributed to van Helmont:

The various editions and translations of van Helmont's books are listed in alphabetical order according to their shortened English title.

I. *Alphabet of Nature*

Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima Delineatio quae simul methodum suppeditat, juxta quam qui surdi nati sunt sic informari possunt, ut non alios saltem loquentes intelligent, sed & ipsi ad sermonis usum perventiant. In lucem edita a F.M.B. ab Hemont, Sulzbaci, typis Abrahami Lichtenthaler, 1657 [1667].

Kurtzer Entwurff des eigentlichen Natrualphabets der Heiligen Sprache—nach dessen Anleitung man auch Taubgebohrne verstehend und redend machen kan. Aus Liecht gegeben durch F. von Hellmont, Sultzbach, bey Abrahami Lichtenthaler, 1667.

*Een zeer korte Afbeelding van het ware natuurlyke Hebreuwse A.B.C., welke die Doofgeboren syn, sodanig konnen verstaan, maar selfs tot het gebruik van spreken komen. In't light gegeven door den Baron Francis Mercurius van Hemont, met kooper platen verciert also mede een Verhandeling om de Doofgeborene te leeren spreken door Joh. Conrad Amman, Med. Doct. T'*Amsterdam, by Pieter Rotterdam, 1697.

II. *Boethius*

Des fürtrefflichen hochweisen Herrn Sever. Boetti weil. Bürgermeisters zu Rom, christlich-vernunftgemesser Trost und Unterricht, in Widerwertigkeit und Bestürzung über dem vermeyten Wohl–oder Uebelstand der Bösen and Frommen, in fünf Büchern verdeutscht und mit beygefügten kurnzen Amerkungen über etliche dunkele Ort desselben,—sammt eigentlicher Lebensbeschreibung des seligen Boetii, Gedurckt in her Fürstl. Pfalzgräl. Resid. Stadt Sultzbach, curch Abraham Lichtenthaler, 1667.

Des fürtrefflichen hochweisen Severini Boetti Christlich-vermunftgemesser Trost and Unterricht in Widerwertigkeit und Bestützung über dem vermeinten Woh – oder Uebelstand der Bösen und Frommen verteutschet, und mit beygefügten kurzen Anmerkungen über etliche Ort desselben, zum andermahl aufgelegt, Lüneburg, Stern, 1697.

III. *Cabbalistical Dialogue*

A Cabbalistical Dialogue in answer to the Opinion of a learned Doctor in Philosophy and Theology, that the World was made of Nothing, as it is contained in the second part of the Cabbala Denudate et Apparatus in Lib. Sohar, p. 308 &c. Printed in Latin at Sulsbach [sic] Anno, 1677. To which is subjoined a Rabbinical and Paraphrastical Exposition of Genesis I. Written in High-Dutch by the Author of the foregoing dialogue, first done into Latin, but now made English, Printed for Benjamin Clarke in George-Yard in Lombard-street, 1682.

IV. *Chemical Aphorisms*

CLIII Aphorismi Chemici ad quos quicquid est scieniae Chemice [sic] commode referri potest, concinnati opera & studio Eremitae Suburbani, nec non impressi, Amstelaedami, apud Janssonis-Waesbergios, 1688.

One Hundred fifty-three Chymical Aphorisms to which whatever belongs to the Chymical Science may be commodiously referred, done by the labour and study of Eremita Suburbanus, printed in Latin at Amsterdam, 1687. To which are added some other phylosophick canons, or rules, pertaining to the Hermetick Science made English and published for the sake of the lovers and labourers in true Chymistry by Christopher Packe, Philochymico-medicus, sold by D. Newman at the King's Arms in the Poultry, & W. Copper at the Pelican in Little Britain, London: 1688.

An hundred and fifty Chymical Aphorisms, to which whatever relates to the science of Chymistry may fitly be referred, done by the labour and study of a Country Hermit, & printed in Latinat Amsterdam, Printed for A. Churchill at the Black Swan in Ave Mary Lane, London, 1690.

CLIII Aphorismes Chymiques, ausquels on peut facilement rapporter tout ce qui regard la Chymie. Mis en ordre par les soins & le travail de l'Hermite du Fauxbourg. Nouvellement traduit du Latin en Francais par M.S.D.R. a Paris, chez Laurent d'Houry, rue Sain Jacques, devant la Fontaine S. Severin, au Saint Esprit, avec Privilege du Roy, 1692, 1693.

*Kurze Vorstellung der zur edlen Chymie gehörigen Wissenschafft bestehend in CLIII Aphorismis oder kurzen Sätzen, dahin alles, was zur Alchymie gehöret, gar füglich gezogen werden Vormahls in lateinischer Ssprace zu Amsterdam, von einem Liebhaber diieser Kunst sich Eremitam Suburbanum nennend herausgegeben ietsi aber übersetzet und also zum andermahligen Druck befördert von D. David Kellnern/*Nordhausen, 1699.

V. *The Divine Being*

The Divine Being and its Attributes philosophically demonstrated from the Holy Scriptures and Original Nature of Things according to the Principles of F.M.B. of Helmont written in Low-Dutch by Paulus Buchius, Dr. of Physick & translated into English by Philanglus [Benjamin Furly], licensed Sep. 25 London, Printed and are to be sold by Randall Taylor, near Stationers' Hall, 1693. This work contains an "Appendix of Several Questions with their Answers concerning the Hypothesis of the Revolution of Humane Souls" and "an Extract from the Last Words of the Philosopher Socrates concerning the Immortality of Souls."

Het godlyk weezen en deszelfs eygenschappen, philosophischerwyzw gedemonstreed uyt de Heylige Schriftuure en de oorsponkelyke naturre der zaaken. Naar de gronden van Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont. In't Nederduytsch geschreven door Paulus Buchius, Med. Doct. Nu n denvorleden Jare 1693 mit last van den vormoemden Heere van Hemont in't Engels vertaalt, en met publijque authorisatie tot London uitgegeven. T'Amsterdam gedrukt voor den Hr. van Helmont en zyn te bekomen by Pieter Rotterdam, 1694.

VI. *Genesis*

Quaedam praemeditatae & consideratae cogitationes super quatuour priora capita libri primi Moysis, Genesis nominati prolatae a Francisco Mercurio ab Helmont, Amsterlodami, prostant apud Henr. Wetstenium, 1697.

Einige Gedancken über Die vier ersten Capitel Des Ersten Buches Moses, Genesis genamt. Aus Liechtgegeben von Herr Baron Franciscus Mercurio von Helmont und Merode, Anno 1698.

Enige voor-bedagte en oeverwogene Bedenkingen over de vier eerste Kapittelen des eersten Boeks Moysis, Genesis genaamt. Voortgebragt van Franciscus Mercurius van Hemont t'Amsterdam, by Pieter Rotterdam, Boekverkooper op de Vygendam, 1698.

Some premeditate and considerate Thoughts upon the four Chapters of the first Book of Mosis called Gensis, delivered by Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, translated from the Latin Copy, printed, London, Anno 1701.

VII. *Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana*

Thesaurus novus experientiae Medicae aureus, - oder Guldener Artzney-Schatz neuer niemals entdecken Medicamenten wider allerhand Leib-Kranckheiten,— in sich haltend anchfolgended herrliche medicinische Tractaten zo zuvor niemal in Druck kommen, —. Medicina Experimentalis Helmontiana, das ist des vortrefflicher und höchsterleuchten Hr. Hr. Francisci Mercurii van Helmont neu-entdeckte und bewährteste Artzney-Mittel, &c., Basel, In Verlag Emmanuel Konig des Eltern, Im Jahr Christi, 1704.

Thesaurus Novus Experiementiae Medicae aurens; oder Guldener Artzney-Schatz neuer niemals entdeckten Medicamenten wider allerhand Leibs-Kranckheiten; auss den fürtrefflichen Schriften Fr. Merc. van Helmont, Rob. Boyle, und anderer beruhmten Medicoru, samt denen glücklich-aussgeschlagenene/geschwind-helffenden bassleeeeer-und schweitzerischen artzney- und hauss-mittelm/ Eröffnet von E.K.M.D. Basel, Thurneysen, 1723.

VIII. *Paradoxal Discourses*

Paradoxal Discourses of F.M. van Helmont, concerning the macrocosm and microcosm, or the greater and lesser world, and their union set down in writing by J.B. and now published, London, Printed by J.C. and Freeman Collins, for Robert Kettlewel, at the Hand and Scepter near St. Dunstan's Church in Fleetstreet, 1685.

Eenige Gedagten van Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont rakende de natur-kund, t'Amsterdam: by Hendrik Jansen, 1690.

Francisci Mercurii Freyherrn von Helmont Paradoxal Discourses, oder,—Ungemeine Meynungen von dem Macrocosmo und Microcosmo, das ist—von der grossen und kleinern Welt und derselben Versinigung mit einander worinnen von der Sonnen, Mond und Sternen, und ihrer Würckung und Einfluss, wie auch insonderkeit von dem Menschen, Thieren, Erdgewäschen, Metallen und Mineralien, Steinen und Saltzen sampt anderen Curiösen Dingen aus der Erfahrung nachdencklich gehandelt wird. Auss der Englischen in die Hochdeutsche Sprache übersetzet durch J(ohann) L(ange), Hamburg, Verlegts Gottfried Liebernickel, 1691.

Francisci Mercurii van Helmonts Paradoxale Discoursen ofte ongemeene Meeningen van de groote en kleine wereld, desselfs vereeninging in alle natuurlyke azken en speciall van de wederkeering der menschenlyke zielen uit het Engels vertaald door D.K. t'Amsterdam, bij Henrik Jansen, 1693.

IX. *Pisani*

Der Italienisch Lycurgus oder Gesetze und Ordnungen durch und nach welcher die Rechte und Schluenige Gerechtigkeit verfugt wird. durch Octavium Pisani. Sulzbach, Abraham Lichtenthaler, 1666.

Lycurgus Italicus, sive Leges per et juxta quas sit & administratur vera, prompta et expedita Justitia per Octavium Pisani, Italice colelctae, Sulzbaci: Abrahami Lichtenthaleri, 1666.

X. *Seder Olam*

Seder Olam,—or the order, series, or succession of all the ages, periods, and times of the whole world is theologically, philosophically, and chronologically explicated and stated. Also the hypothesis of the pre-existency and revolution of humane souls,—together with the thousand years reign of Christ on the earth, probably evinced, and delivered in an historical enarration thereof, according to the Holy Scriptures. To which is also annexed, Some Explanatory Questions of the Book of Revelations or the like import. And an Appendix, —containing some Emendations and explanations of divers, passages, in the two foregoing treatises out of the author's original manuscripts and papers. Translated out of Latin by J. Clark, M.D. upon the leave and recommendation of F.M. Baron of Helmont. London, printed for T. Howkins, in George-Yard, Lombard Street, 1694.

Seder Olam sive ordo seculaorum, historica enarratio doctrinae, anno 1693.

XI. *The Spirit of Diseases*

Aanmerkingen van Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, over den mens, en desselfs Siektens., — alaler op gewisse en onfeilbare gronden, so van de natuerlyke reden als ervantheid gevestigd. Het eerste Deel, t'Amsterdam by Pieter Rotterdam, Boekverkoper op de Vygendam, 1692.

Observationes circahominem ejusque morbos certissimis sanae rationis & experientiae superstructae per Paulum Buchium Med. Doct. et e Belgico in Latinum sermonem translatae per Johan. Conrad. Amman Med. Doct. Amstelaedami apud Joannem Wolters, 1692.

The Spirit of Diseases, —or Diseases from the Spirit,—laid open in some observations concerning man, and his diseases, wherein is shewed how much the mind influenceth the body in causing and curing of diseases. The whole deduced from certain and infallible principles of natural reason and experience by Franciscus Mercurius, Baron of Helmont, The first part, London, printed for Sarah Howkins, 1694.

XII. *Two Hundred Queries*

Two Hundred Quereis moderately propounded concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls, and its Conformity with the Truth of the Christian Religion, printed for Robert Kettlewel, at the Hand and Scepter over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleetstreet, London, 1684.

Zweyhundert Fragen betreffend die Lehre von der Widerkehr der menschlichen Seelen und wie solche mit der Wahrheit der Christenthums ubereinkomme, aus Englischen, 1686.

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London, The British Museum, Sloane MS 530, 617.
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Abbreviations

AJS	*The Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies*
BJHP	*British Journal of the History of Philosophy*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JHP	*Journal of the History of Philosophy*
JWCI	*Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*
MWS	*Midwest Studies in Philosophy*
REJ	*Revue des Études Juives*
SL	*Studia Leibnitiana*
SLS	*Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa*
SLSH	*Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft*

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INDEX

Aboab de Fonseca, Rabbi Isaac 82n, 130-131, 198, 348
Abulafia, Abraham 85, 115, 145, 146
Adam Kadmon, 82, 120, 125, 127-9
  as Christ 127-129
Agrippa, Cornelius 78, 82, 84, 89, 90, 94, 101, 144, 227
Aikenhead, Thomas 288
alchemy, 13, 24, 31, 51, 96, 119, 121, 124, 141-5, 150, 161, 237, 270, 271, 304, 309, 310, 311, 317, 336, 337, 339, 340
  Jewish alchemy, 138-9, 166-7
Altmann, Alexander, 130-1, 348
Ames, William, 36
Amman, Johan Conrad 59n, 60, 69, 70
Andreae, Johan Valentin, 94-9, 108
anti-Semitism, 51, 104-6, 133, 299, 342
Aquinas, St. Thomas 11, 162, 331
archeus, 8, 9, 38, 159, 267, 317, 319
Arikh Anpin, 127, 187
Aristotle, 5, 8, 63, 76, 147, 148, 160, 162, 316, 318, 331
Arminians, 130
Arnauld, Antoine, 308
Arndt, Johann, 40
astrology, 77, 92, 142, 163, 166
Augustine, 55, 64, 190, 228, 331, 332, 335, 337
  condemnation of curiosity, 335
Avicenna, 11

Bacon, Francis, 15, 19, 66, 74, 151, 168, 336, 338, 339, 340
  Salomon's House, 151
Barclay, Robert, 98, 180, 181, 182, 185, 191-2, 210, 211-2, 213, 214, 219, 242, 257, 263, 274
Bayle, Pierre, 275
Bekker, Balthasar, 287
Benz, Ernst, 83, 97, 109, 111, 115, 130
Boehme, Jakob 11, 35, 48, 82, 96-8, 101, 108, 157, 321, 343
Boethius, 58, 102, 140, 141
Boreel, Adam, 43, 116, 131, 172, 183, 274, 279
Boyle, Robert,4, 5, 17, 19, 60, 103, 152, 168, 170, 171, 172, 276, 280, 310, 311, 338
  relationship to the elder van Helmont, 170
Brawe, Justus, 40-2, 55
Bruno, Giordano,74, 328, 329, 333, 336
Buchius, Paulus, 60, 198, 283-4

Calixt, Georg, 28
Cambridge Platonists, 193, 194, 203, 226, 228, 239
Camillo, Guilio, 93, 94, 95, 147
Campanella, Tommaso, 11, 94, 95
Cartesian dualism, 124, 202, 206, 222, 227, 228, 311, 313
Cartesians, 11, 226
Case, John, 13, 161, 221
catarrh, 6
Charles II, 156, 171, 275
Chimay, Princesse de, 173-5
Christian August, 22-30, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39-40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53-5, 56, 58, 102, 106, 107, 108, 132, 133, 135, 136, 172, 210, 344, 345
  attitude towards Jews, 133
  conversion to Catholicism, 28, 30
  mental breakdown, 25
  political situation in Sulzbach, 23
  unorthodoxy, 55
Christina, Queen, 4, 28, 29, 344
Clark, Benjamin, 60, 262-3, 305
Clarke, William, 251, 281
Collegiants, 130, 172, 183, 214, 270
Comenius, Jon Amos, 41
Conway, Edward, 178
  antipathy for Quakers, 216-7
Conway, Viscountess Anne
  Christology, 203
  conversion to Quakerism, 212
  critique of More's dualism, 228
  death, 218
  illness, 30, 156
  theory of matter, 204
  universal salvation, 207
Copernicus, 19, 337
Couturat, Louis, 309
Croese, Gerard, 45, 215, 241, 250, 251, 256, 257, 265, 269
Croll, Oswald, 7

d'Aubry, Jean, 37, 172
da Costa, Uriel,131, 344
Dante, 129
Debus, Allen G., 12, 37, 66, 163, 169
Dee, John, 144, 336
Deism, 70, 272, 344
Descartes, René 15, 22, 66, 67, 118, 158, 168, 177, 202, 205, 206, 220, 223, 226, 227, 233, 234, 337
  see Cartesian dualism
Desmaizeux, Pierre, 284
Dunton, John, 268

Duret, Claude, 92, 93
Dury, John, 28, 117, 131, 172
ecumenism, 41, 51, 55, 107, 108, 271, 285, 311, 349

Elizabeth, Palatine Princess and Abbess of Herford, 22, 153, 206, 212, 214, 310
Erasmus, 15, 104, 273, 338, 339
Erastus, Thomas, 13, 14, 17, 62
Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 29
Everard, John, 186

Fabricius, Johann Jakob, 40-2, 55
Familists, 180-1, 186
Faust, 169, 175, 335, 336
Ferdinand III, 24
Ficino, Marsilio, 11, 77, 78, 83-4, 86, 89, 91, 94, 95, 101, 143, 227, 228, 231, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 339, 348
Finch, John, 30, 31, 32, 169, 177, 219, 322, 323
Florinus, Clamerus, 40, 41, 42, 55
Fludd, Robert, 101, 144, 168
Foot, Daniel, 20, 60, 171, 260, 274
Fox, Geroge, 37, 98, 160, 161, 166, 182, 183, 184-5, 186, 189, 217, 221, 241, 255, 261, 262, 263, 264, 266, 274
  Book of Miracles, 185
  Memorandum about van Helmont, 261-3
Frankenberg Abraham von, 35
Furly, Benjamin, 37, 60, 98, 131, 181, 198, 246, 257, 264, 265, 269, 272, 273, 275, 276, 277, 278, 280, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 289, 302, 307
  disillusionment with Quakers, 286
  library, 272
  transmigration of souls, 283

Galenists, 5, 6, 7, 17, 31, 153, 154, 155, 163, 166, 170, 274
Galenus, Abraham, 181, 183, 274
Galileo, 4, 152, 228, 337, 339
Gikatilla, RAbbi Joseph, 119, 121, 140, 145
gilgul, 121
Glanvil, Joseph, 172, 194, 195, 196, 198, 240, 246, 264
gnosis, xii-xiii, 14, 20, 101, 142-6, 153, 157, 184, 190, 192, 226, 315, 324, 327, 334, 337, 339-41
  characteristics of gnostic mentality, 20
  third component in western culture, 101
Gnosticism, 121, 153, 339, 340, 341
Graevius, J.G., 274

Hartlib, Samuel, 14, 43, 44, 112, 116, 131, 156, 168, 170, 172, 338, 340
Harvey, William, 12, 17, 19, 30, 67, 156
hell, 111, 129, 130, 131, 132, 184, 193, 195, 198, 206, 221, 224, 254, 273, 279, 281, 289, 297, 302, 305, 320, 348
  matter, 316, 319
Hendricks, Peter, 257-61
Hermes Trismegistus, 74, 83, 95, 142, 143, 147, 186, 229, 231, 331, 332, 337
Hermeticism, 1, 20, 76, 96, 101, 107, 121, 142, 145, 186, 330, 331, 333, 334, 337, 338, 340, 341
Hermeticists, 10, 13, 59, 83, 113, 230, 327
Herrera, Abraham Cohen, 82, 119, 130, 200, 348
hieroglyphs, 78, 84, 90
Hilling, Gregorius, 24
Hobbes, Thomas, 202, 293
Horapollo, 77
Hume, David, 318

Iamblichus, 73, 76, 78, 83, 192, 276
ibbur, 123, 128, 253, 304
Idel, Moshe, 81, 85, 111, 115, 116, 118, 119, 128, 145, 146, 341, 342, 346, 347, 348
Inquisition, 11, 13, 17, 30, 34, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 61, 128, 132, 154, 160, 214, 286, 287, 296, 302, 305, 327
Isaac de Rocamora, 100

Johann Philipp von Schönborn, Bishop of Würzburg and Archbishop and Elector of Mainz., 29, 34, 43, 308

Karl Ludwig, Elector of the Palatine, 22, 23, 24, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 156, 173, 212, 213
Keith, George, 60, 167, 179-84, 186-92, 196, 198, 201, 208, 209, 210, 217, 219, 222, 241, 242-57, 262, 263, 266, 269, 270, 274
  charged with heresy by Quakers, 244
  expelled by Quakers, 257
  the transmigration of souls, 245
Keithian Controversy, 241, 243, 247, 249, 250, 257, 269, 270. *See* Keith, George
  historical ramifications, 249
Kempis, Thomas, 325
Knorr von Rosenroth
  attacked for interest in Kabbalah, 114
  critique of Locke's Essay, 280, 303
  Renaissance Man, 100
  skill in alchemy and chemistry, 101
  view of Catholicism, 102
Kohlhans, Tobias Ludwig, 35, 45, 172, 265, 266, 274
Kolakowski, L., 107, 110
Koyré, Alexander, 11

L'Empereur, Constantine, 128
Lazarelli's, Ludovico, 86

Le Clerc, Jean, 273, 276, 280
LeBlon, Christoph, 35
LeBlon, Michael, 35
Leibniz
  alchemy, 309, 310, 311
    volition, 318
  ecumenism, 308
  first meeting with van Helmont, 309
  force, 319
  Helmont, J. B. van, 319
    influence ofmonads, 317
  monads
    J. B. van Helmont as source, 316
  monads, 318
  panpsychism, 319
  pre-established harmony, 319
  von Rosenroth, meeting with, 308
Leonardo da Vinci, 68
Lessing, Abbé de, 173, 174
Levita, Elias, 72
Libavius, Andreas, 14, 16
Limborch, Phillippe, van, 273, 274, 287, 289, 290, 296, 297, 298, 301, 307, 344
Locke, John,
  as a tragic figure, 305
  attitude towards Jews, 295
  innate ideas, 302
  meeting with van Helmont, 276
  Socianianism, 288
  van Helmont's visit to Oates, 277
Lull, Raymond, 85
Luria, Rabbi Isaac, 81, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 127, 129, 145, 146, 186, 190, 191, 196, 197, 234, 268, 316, 320, 347
Lurianic Kabbalah, 101, 118-24, 127, 132, 139, 145, 146, 157, 176, 177, 178, 179, 190, 192, 196, 197, 200, 201, 206, 208, 232, 236, 237, 257, 267, 268, 311, 313, 316, 323, 328, 341, 346-8
  monism, 318
Luther, Martin, 7, 19, 41, 48, 53, 105, 106, 107, 307, 344

magic, 11, 14, 17, 51, 65, 77, 78, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 95, 97, 101, 105, 108, 124, 141, 142, 149, 160, 227, 330, 331, 333, 335, 336, 348
Masham, Damaris, 275, 276, 282, 302, 303, 304, 305
mechanical philosophy, 19, 101, 158, 168, 170, 183, 222, 233, 280, 311
Meir (ben Juda Levie) Stern (d. 1679)., 100
Mersenne, Marin, 16, 67, 337
Mesmer, Anton, 168
millenarianism, 43, 107, 118, 172, 183, 349
monad, 314, 318, 319, 324
monadology, 310, 319
Monadology, 313, 317, 318
Montanus, Arias, 181, 283
More, Henry
  "inner light", 222
  Conjectura Cabbalistica, 232
  controversy with Thomas Vaughan, 229
  correspondence with Knorr, 223
  critique of Kabbalah, 233
  enthusiasm, 229
  epistemology, 236
  friendship with van Helmont, 220
  mystical experiences, 230
  Neoplatonic orientation, 226
  rejection of mechanical philosophy, 222
  tolerance, 229. 239
Morian, Johan, 116
Mortera, Rabbi Saul Levi ,130, 131
Moses Germanus, 115, 133, 344, 345, 346. *See* Späth

Nayler, James, 184-5
Neoplatonism, 77, 96, 101, 116, 124, 141, 145, 192, 203, 204, 208, 226, 227, 228, 232, 313, 315, 318, 330, 331, 332, 339, 340, 348
Neoplatonists, 10, 11, 13, 16, 59, 76, 78, 83, 101, 117, 223, 233, 331, 332, 336, 341, 348
Newton, Isaac, 70, 166, 168, 170, 227, 279, 288, 307, 311, 327, 330, 338, 340

Oldenburg, Henry, 4, 5, 43, 60, 103, 131, 168, 170, 171, 172, 173, 278
Origen, 77, 83, 129, 193, 194, 198, 199, 228, 321

Pagel, Walter, 4, 12, 18, 19, 67, 90, 103, 143, 316, 319
pantheism, 128, 129, 200, 201, 202, 234, 238
Paracelsians, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 37, 66, 157, 169
  conflict with Galenists, 5
Paracelsus, 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 38, 62, 66, 82, 90, 101, 143, 150, 153, 157, 159, 168, 264, 274, 317
  archeus, 317
  homonculus, 90
  Oporinus's description of, 13
  signatures, doctrine of, 16, 90
Paré, Ambrose, 68
Parker, Samuel, 195
Patai, Raphael, 138, 139, 166, 167
Pelagianism, 128, 144, 240, 338, 339, 341
Pelagius, 324
Penington, Issac, 181, 243, 254, 255, 262
Penn, William, 180, 181, 182, 185, 249, 258, 263, 264, 265, 269, 270, 274, 283

perfectionism, 128, 146, 183, 190, 237, 320
Philipp Wilhelm, Duke of Neuburg, 25, 27, 30, 35, 41, 42, 54-6,, 108
charges against van Helmont, 54
Philo, 76, 77, 108, 117, 203, 232, 309
philo-Semitism, 104, 108, 132, 133
Pico, 10, 15, 78, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 91, 94, 95, 101, 104, 107, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 125, 145, 147, 307, 332, 333, 334, 336, 340, 348
Pisani, Octavius, 58
Plato, 63, 68, 73, 74, 76, 83, 84, 117, 147, 148, 192, 202, 228, 233, 256, 276, 313, 318, 326, 331
Plotinus, 11, 76, 78, 83, 116, 203, 227, 228, 230, 231, 316, 332, 339
Poemer, Johann Abraham, 29, 53
Poleman, Joachim, 172
Popkin, R.H., 15, 107, 109, 110, 116, 117, 131, 166, 172, 221, 239, 274, 296, 342, 346
Popple,William, 274, 275, 277, 291
Porta, J.B.m 101
Postel, Guillaume, 78, 82, 90, 91, 92, 101, 111, 112, 113, 145, 181, 182
predestination, 96, 113, 130, 222, 247, 273, 297, 301, 305, 327, 345
prisca theologia, 20, 74, 101, 110, 113, 114, 117, 147, 148, 340
Proast, Jonas, 301
progress, 74, 104, 107, 146, 152, 181, 202, 213, 218, 238, 257, 307, 311, 320, 322, 324, 326, 330, 333, 335, 337, 338, 340, 342, 347
Pythagoras, 73, 74, 147, 148, 233, 236, 248, 256, 277, 326, 327

Quakers, 4, 35-7, 39, 41, 45, 48, 49, 52, 54, 98-100, 176, 177, 179-86, 188-212, 214-22, 238-44, 246-57, 260-5, 269, 270, 272, 274, 275, 284, 285, 286
Ames, William, 36
Christopresent theology, 184
hatred of, 184
persecution and suffering, 215
rejection of the transmigration of souls, 248

reincarnation, 124, 192, 193, 194, 195, 213, 222, 253, 266, 281, 282, 283, 284, 293
Reuchlin, Johannes, 70, 78, 82, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 94, 104, 106, 113, 145
Rosicrucian, 21, 24, 96, 107, 108, 121, 147-52, 310, 330
Rosicrucian Manifestos, 96, 147-51, , 330
Rosicrucians, 21, 41, 148, 150
Royal Society, 4, 60, 103, 170, 171, 173, 278, 338
Rupert, Palatine Prince, 22, 32, 33, 156, 171, 175
Russell, Bertrand, 309
Rust, 1George, 72, 193, 194, 198

Sarug, Israel, 119, 130, 348
Scholem, Gershom, 59, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 100, 111, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 125, 127, 129, 138, 145, 146, 192, 201, 330, 341, 342, 343, 346, 347
Schönborn, *see* Johann Philipp von Schönborn
Schudt, J.J., 115, 133, 346
Schütz, Johann Friedrich, 309
Sefer Yezirah, 79, 80, 81, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 92, 93
Serrarius, Peter, 43, 44, 100, 108, 117, 172, 274
Sewel, William, 36, 191, 192, 215, 255
Shekhinah, 125, 127, 145, 146
shevirath-ha-kelim, 120
Simpson, William, 170
skepticism, 15, 16, 239, 272, 306, 307, 338, 343, 344, 345
Socinians, 128, 130, 281, 343
Sophie, Duchess of Hanover, 22, 173, 212
Southwell, Robert, 170
Späth, Peter, 115, 133, 343, 344, 345, 346. *See* Moses Germanus
Spener, P.J>, 30, 243, 244, 321
Sprat, Thomas, 338
Stahl, Peter, 280
Stubbe, Henry, 171
Swammerdam, J., 103, 267

Talmud, 72, 81, 104, 113, 121, 139, 145, 346
Tauler, 325
Tauler, Johann, 27, 48
Tetragrammaton, 79, 81, 88, 126, 140
Thomas à Kempis, 27
tikkun, 120, 121, 122, 127, 129, 130, 132, 145, 311, 320, 323, 324, 328, 348
toleration, 24, 28, 29, 56, 104, 107, 133, 135, 271, 276, 286, 295, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 311, 330, 342, 349
transmuatation, 1, 44, 140, 142, 144, 145, 150, 172, 173, 184. 326
transmutation, 310
Trinity, 85, 109, 112, 113, 115, 116, 125, 127, 138, 187, 204, 221, 273, 288, 289, 301, 302, 344
Tyrrell, James, 293, 294
tzimtzum, 120

universal medicine, 174
Ursprache, 73, 87, 98, 99
vacuum, 66, 67

Vaughan, Thomas, 183, 221, 229, 232

Vital, Hayim, 65, 81, 118, 119, 120, 122, 127, 139, 166
Voegelin, Eric, 340
Voltaire, 152, 311, 320, 327, 328

Wagenseil, J.C. 115, 134, 135
Walker, D.P., 9, 13, 66, 74, 77, 79, 83, 84, 86, 89, 93, 111, 117, 129, 192, 193, 264, 281, 320, 330
weapon salve, 12, 13
Weber, Max 337
Webster, John, 171
Whitehead, 248, 249

Yagel, Abraham, 140, 141
Yates, Frances A.., 20, 74, 77, 85, 86, 93, 94, 95, 96, 107, 121, 125, 145, 147, 148, 151, 152, 192, 330, 331, 333, 334, 336, 337, 338, 341

Zeir Anpin, 127, 129, 187
Zohar, 64, 68, 82, 109, 110, 111, 114, 116, 139, 232, 276, 278, 324

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